

of men and angels by Xlpver

Series: [scars of fire \[1\]](#)

Category: IT (2017), IT - Stephen King, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: A lot of gays, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, F/M, Inspired by Shadowhunters (TV), Kinda, M/M, Magic, ST characters are mostly cameos tho, beverly is in a love triangle, eleven is badass, ill change a lot of things, only the world, slowburn

Language: English

Characters: Adrian Mellon, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mike Hanlon, Norbert Keene, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Stamley Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Mike Hanlon/Beverly Marsh

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-02-15

Updated: 2018-04-09

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:36:26

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 31

Words: 111,417

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

When fifteen-year-old Eddie Kaspbrak heads out to the Pandemonium Club in New York City with his best friends Beverly and Stan, he hardly expects to witness a murder—much less a murder committed by three teenagers covered with strange tattoos and brandishing bizarre weapons. Then the body disappears into thin air. It's hard to call the police when the murderers are invisible to everyone else and when there is nothing—not even a smear of blood—to show that a boy has died. Or was he a boy?

This is Eddie's first meeting with the Shadowhunters, warriors dedicated to ridding the earth of demons. It's also his first encounter with Richie, a Shadowhunter who looks a little like an angel and acts a lot like a jerk. Within twenty-four hours Eddie is pulled into

Richie's world with a vengeance, when his mother disappears and Eddie himself is attacked by a demon. But why would demons be interested in ordinary mundanes like Eddie and his mother? And how did Eddie suddenly get the Sight? The Shadowhunters would like to know...

aka The Shadowhunter AU nobody asked for, but I wanted to do it lol

1. That Night In Pandemonium

Author's Note:

The shadowhunter world belongs to the queen Cassandra Clare, I'm just using the setting :P so there will be a lot of changes

"I think this is a bad idea." Eddie Kaspbrak pinched his best friend, Stanley Uris, in the arm. The boy looked at him with an annoyed face.

"Eddie, you think *everything* we do is a bad idea." Eddie just stared at his best friend's face, he realized Stan's hair was longer, or maybe it was just his imagination, Eddie always imagined things.

"Well tonight is no exception." He had his arms crossed "I will not enter a *club*, it's so unsanitary."

They were both standing outside of the Club Pandemonium, Eddie could hear the music even from there.

Stan rolled his eyes "It's either this or go to your house to watch 'Wheel of Fortune' with your mom all night."

Eddie sighed "Fine, we can stay here. *One hour*. Okay?"

"Hey, losers!" A sharp voice was behind Eddie, he turned around and saw his other best friend Beverly Marsh. Tonight, she was using a green headband to match with her short red hair.

"Is that a headband? Who uses those anymore?" Stan's sarcasm was present in the air. Beverly just gave him the finger and looked at Eddie.

"So, are we going in?" She was excited like a child with a lot of candy.

"We don't know, Eddie is being a pussy." Stan was now crossing his arms "He thinks he's gonna get cancer just by looking at the door."

“Screw you!” Eddie shouted and went to open the brown wooden door, when he felt someone pushed him aside and making him land on the floor.

“Careful, kid.” A boy with striking blue hair and a red jacket, maybe a 20 years old, stood by the door watching Eddie with amusement.

“What the hell, dude?” Beverly approached Eddie and helped him stand up, Eddie could've sworn the boy had red eyes for a second.

“Ugh, mundanes.” Was all the boy said before entering the club, closing the door loudly after them, but not so loudly because the music was still louder.

“What the hell was his problem?” Stan sounded angry, which was strange, Stan was know for his bright personality, he didn't got mad except when he lost in Mario Kart.

“Whatever, he was just an asshole.” Eddie replied, and opened the door, the first thing Eddie saw was people dancing, or at least...it *looked* like they were dancing.

“Oh my God.” Beverly sounded impressed “This place is cleaner than my house.”

“Bev, public bathrooms are cleaner than your house.” It was the first time Eddie made a joke like that, but it worked, he could hear Stan's iconic laugh.

“C'mon guys, let's get some beer.”

The blue haired boy was leaning on the wall, watching all the humans dancing, being happy. Mundanes were so boring.

They threw away their lives for money, for packets of powder, for a stranger's charming smile. He thought of the boy outside the club, he knew the kid saw his eyes, for a moment he thought the boy was a Shadowhunter, but it was impossible, he would already be dead by now. Shadowhunters inmediately recognized demons and killed them.

"I need you to come with me." A boy was standing in front of him, he had messy brown hair and brown eyes, he had a dangerous look on his face. *Ha, this kid is so dead.* He decided to have a little fun though. It had been a long time since he had sex with mundanes. And this guy looked hot.

"What for?" He raised an eyebrow.

The boy just whispered in his ear "I'm gonna rock your world." and left, he followed the brown-haired boy.

They went into an almost empty space in the club and realized the brown-haired boy was opening a door. He caught a glimpse of stacked boxes, tangled wiring. A storage room. He glanced behind him-no one was looking. So much the better if the sexy boy wanted privacy.

He slipped into the room after him, unaware that he was being followed.

"Guys, I don't know about you but this place sucks." Stan said, he turned to Eddie "Maybe we should leave."

"I agree," Beverly said. "What kind of club doesn't serve drinks to underages?"

Eddie didn't reply. They were dancing, or what passed for it- a lot of swaying back and forth with occasional lunges toward the floor as if one of them had dropped a contact lens-in a space between a group of teenage boys in metallic corsets, and a young Asian couple who were making out passionately, their colored hair extensions tangled together like vines. A boy with a lip piercing and a teddy bear backpack was handing out free tablets of herbal ecstasy, his parachute pants flapping in the breeze from the wind machine. Eddie wasn't paying much attention to their immediate surroundings-his eyes were on the blue-haired boy who'd talked his way into the club. He was leaning against a wall as if he were looking for something.

He looked a little lost, as if he hadn't found whom he was looking for.

Eddie wondered what would happen if he went up and introduced himself. Maybe he'd just stare at him. Or maybe he was shy too. Maybe he wasn't a bad guy, but he'd know. Maybe...

The blue-haired boy straightened up suddenly, snapping to attention, like a hunting dog on point. Eddie followed the line of his gaze, and saw a brown-haired boy in the leather clothes.

Eddie couldn't see the brown-haired boy's face but he somehow felt familiar. The blue-haired boy saw him with lust. *Oh, he's gay.* Eddie thought. He shouldn't be surprised, he was gay too.

"My five year old cousin is a better DJ than this dude," Beverly sighed. "For once in my life, I wanna go to Eddie's house."

"Amen." Stan replied.

Eddie rolled his eyes but didn't say anything. His attention was on the boy with the leather clothes. Through the darkness, smoke, and artificial fog, he could almost see his face, he seemed attractive. No wonder the blue-haired boy was following him as if he were under a spell, too distracted to notice anything else around him-even the two dark shapes hard on his heels, weaving after him through the crowd. Eddie slowed his dancing and stared. He could just make out that the shapes were boys, tall and wearing black clothes. He couldn't have said how he knew that they were following the other boy, but he did. He could see it in the way they paced him, their careful watchfulness, the slinking grace of their movements. A small flower of apprehension began to open inside his chest.

Eddie raised himself up on tiptoe, trying to see over the crowd. The two guys had stopped at the door and seemed to be conferring with each other. One of them had auburn hair, the other dark-haired. The auburn one reached into his jacket and drew out something long and sharp that flashed under the strobing lights. A knife. "Guys!" Eddie shouted.

"What?" Stan sounded alarmed, Beverly also looked scared. "I actually think your house is not that bad, you know?"

"Shut up!" Eddie was now scared "Do you see those guys?" he

pointed wildly, almost hitting a curvy black girl who was dancing nearby. The girl gave him a nasty look. Eddie ignored her.

“What guys?” Beverly asked, looking around.

Stan shrugged “I don't see anything.”

“There are two of them. They were following the guy with the blue hair—”

“The asshole who punched you?” Stan asked.

“Yes, but that's not the point. One of them pulled a knife.”

“Are you sure?” Beverly stared harder, shaking her head. “I still don't see anyone.”

“I'm sure.”

Suddenly all business, Stan squared his shoulders. “I'll get one of the security guards. Bev, stay here with Eddie.” He strode away, pushing through the crowd.

Eddie turned just in time to see the auburn boy slip through the no admittance door, his friend right on his heels. Eddie looked around; Stan was still trying to shove his way across the dance floor, but he wasn't making much progress. Even if Eddie yelled now, no one would hear him, and by the time Stan got back, something terrible might already have happened. Biting hard on his lower lip, Eddie started to wriggle through the crowd.

“Eddie! Where are you going?” Beverly was shouting but Eddie wasn't listening to her.

“What's your name?”

The brown-haired turned and smiled. What faint light there was in the storage room spilled down through high barred windows smeared with dirt. Piles of electrical cables, along with broken bits of mirrored disco balls and discarded paint cans littered the floor.

“Ben.”

“That’s a nice name.” He walked toward the boy, stepping carefully among the wires in case any of them were live. In the faint light the boy looked half-transparent, bleached of color, wrapped in black like a devil. “I haven’t seen you here before.”

“Maybe you didn’t know where to look.” The boy giggled, covering his mouth, there was some sort of bracelet around his wrist. But then he realized, it wasn’t a bracelet but a pattern inked into his skin, a matrix of swirling lines.

He froze “You—”

He didn’t finish. The boy moved with lightning swiftness, striking out at him with his open hand, a blow to his chest that would have sent him down gasping if he’d been a human being. He staggered back, and now there was something in the boy’s hand, a coiling whip that glinted gold as he brought it down, curling around his ankles, jerking him off his feet. He hit the ground, writhing, the hated metal biting deep into his skin. The boy laughed, standing over him, and dizzily he thought that he should have known. No human boy would wear clothes like Ben would.

Ben yanked hard on the whip, securing it. His smile glittered like poisonous water. “He’s all yours, boys.”

A low laugh sounded behind him, and now there were hands on him, hauling him upright, throwing him against one of the concrete pillars. He could feel the damp stone under his back. His hands were pulled behind him, his wrists bound with wire. As he struggled, someone walked around the side of the pillar into his view: a boy, as young as Ben and just as handsome. His tawny eyes glittered like chips of amber. “So,” the boy said. “Are there any more with you?”

The blue-haired boy could feel blood welling up under the too-tight metal, making his wrists slippery. “Any other what?”

“Come on now.” The tawny-eyed boy held up his hands, and his dark sleeves slipped down, showing the runes inked all over his wrists, the backs of his hands, his palms. “You know what I am.” Far back inside

his skull, the shackled boy's second set of teeth began to grind.

"Shadowhunter," he hissed.

The other boy grinned all over his face. "Got you." he said.

Eddie pushed the door to the storage room open, and stepped inside. For a moment he thought it was deserted. The only windows were high up and barred; faint street noise came through them, the sound of honking cars and squealing brakes. The room smelled like old paint, and a heavy layer of dust covered the floor, marked by smeared shoe prints.

There's no one in here, he realized, looking around in bewilderment. It was cold in the room, despite the August heat outside. His back was icy with sweat. He took a step forward, tangling his feet in electrical wires. He bent down to free his sneaker from the cables-and heard voices. A boy's laugh, another boy answering sharply. When he straightened up, he saw them.

It was as if they had sprung into existence between one blink of his eyes and the next. There was the boy in the leather clothes, his brown hair looked like one of those guys in the poster of a hair salon. The two boys were with him-the tall one with auburn hair and the smaller boy, whose black hair gleamed like brass in the dim light coming through the windows high above. The black-haired boy was standing with his hands in his pockets, facing the punk kid, who was tied to a pillar with what looked like piano wire, his hands stretched behind him, his legs bound at the ankles. His face was pulled tight with pain and fear.

Heart hammering in his chest, Eddie ducked behind the nearest concrete pillar and peered around it. He watched as the black-haired boy paced back and forth, his arms now crossed over his chest. "So," he said. "You still haven't told me if there are any other of your kind with you."

Your kind? Eddie wondered what he was talking about. Maybe he'd stumbled into some kind of gang war.

"I don't know what you're talking about." The blue-haired boy's tone was pained but surly.

"He means o-others demons," said the auburn boy, speaking for the first time. "You do know w-what a demon is, don't you?"

"Demons," drawled the black haired boy, tracing the word on the air with his finger. "Religiously defined as hell's denizens, the servants of Satan, but understood here, for the purposes of the Clave, to be any malevolent spirit whose origin is outside our own home dimension —"

"That's enough, Richie," said the brown-haired boy.

"B-Ben's right," agreed the taller boy. "Nobody here needs a lesson in s-semantics-or d-demonology."

They're crazy, Eddie thought. Actually crazy.

Richie raised his head and smiled. There was something fierce about the gesture, something that reminded Eddie of documentaries he'd watched about lions on the Discovery Channel, the way the big cats would raise their heads and sniff the air for prey. "Bill and Ben think I talk too much," he said, "Do you think i talk too much?"

The blue-haired boy didn't reply. His mouth was still working. "I could give you information," he said. "I know where Pennywise is."

Richie glanced back at Bill, who shrugged. "Penny's in the ground," Richie said. "The thing's just toying with us."

Ben crossed his arms "Kill it, Richie," he said. "It's not going to tell us anything."

Richie raised his hand, and Eddie saw dim light spark off the knife he was holding. It was oddly translucent, the blade clear as crystal, sharp as a shard of glass, the hilt set with red stones.

The bound boy gasped. "Pennywise is back!" he protested, dragging at the bonds that held his hands behind his back. "All the Infernal Worlds know it-I know it-I can tell you where he is—"

Rage flared suddenly in Richie's icy eyes. "By the Angel, every time we capture one of you bastards, you claim you know where Pennywise is. Well, we know where he is too. He's in hell. And you —" Richie turned the knife in his grasp, the edge sparking like a line of fire. "You can join him there."

Eddie could take no more. He stepped out from behind the pillar. "Stop!" he cried.

"Where the hell is Eddie?" Stan was shouting, Beverly looked at him desperately.

"I-I don't know! He just ran and I-I couldn't find him." Stan sighed, he brought the security guard along with him.

"Let's go find him!" Stan walked through the crowd and Beverly followed him.

Beverly was scared, Eddie just disappeared and now she had a bad feeling. In a place like this anything could happen, especially to Eddie, who was extremely short for his age and had an innocent face. What if he was kidnapped? Or raped? Or—

Oh God, she thought, God, I don't believe in you but please, if you exist, don't let anything happen to Eddie.

"Bev, if we find him, slap him five times for me okay?" Stan said while they were walking, the guard was following them as well.

"*When we find him, he's gonna have my hand mark on his cheek for years.*"

Richie whirled, so startled that the knife flew from his hand and clattered against the concrete floor. Ben and Bill turned along with him, wearing identical expressions of astonishment. The blue-haired boy hung in his bonds, stunned and gaping.

It was Bill who spoke first. "W-What's this?" he demanded, looking from Eddie to his companions, as if they might know what he was doing there.

"It's a boy," Richie said, recovering his composure. "A mundie boy," he said, half to himself. "And he can see us."

"Of course I can see you," Eddie said. "I'm not blind, you know."

"Oh, but you are," said Richie, bending to pick up his knife. "You just don't know it." He straightened up. "You'd better get out of here, if you know what's good for you."

"Are you insane?" Eddie was now more angry than scared "You'll kill this guy!"

"That's true" Richie got closer to Eddie "But he's not a *guy* as you say, he's a demon"

"Don't t-tell him a-anything, Richie!" Bill shouted, Eddie realized he was stuttering, that reminded him of his three year old cousin who was stuttering too.

"He already knows, Bill" Ben replied "But, Richie, he's a mundie, we should—"

"We should what?" Richie looked at him "Kill him? Send him home? Give him a hug? What do you suggest we do, Ben?" He sounded angry.

Bill and Ben didn't say anything after what Richie said. Eddie was scared too. Terrified, actually.

"Y-You are crazy" Eddie whispered, he almost sounded like Bill "I'm gonna call the police."

Richie then looked at him with superiority, like the blue haired-boy did outside the club "Oh, really? I don't—"

He never got to finish his sentence. At that moment the blue-haired boy, with a high, yowling cry, tore free of the restraints binding him to the pillar, and flung himself on Richie.

They fell to the ground and rolled together, the blue-haired boy tearing at Richie with hands that glittered as if tipped with metal. Eddie backed up, wanting to run, but his feet caught on a loop of wiring and he went down, knocking the breath out of his chest. He could hear Ben shrieking. Rolling over, Eddie saw the blue-haired boy sitting on Richie's chest. Blood gleamed at the tips of his razorlike claws.

"Oh, sorry dude, but I don't swing that way" Richie said "Not with demons, anyway"

The blue-haired boy growled and Eddie could finally see him, *it*. The blue hair dissapeared and his clothes as well, Eddie was now seeing a black figure, like those comic books he used to read with Stan. The thing had red eyes and scaly skin, long nails that were almost buried in Richie's black jacket.

Ben and Bill were running toward them, Ben brandishing a whip in his hand. The *thing* slashed at Richie with claws extended. Richie threw an arm up to protect himself, and the claws raked it, splattering blood. The thing lunged again-and Ben's whip came down across his back. He shrieked and fell to the side.

Swift as a flick of Ben's whip, Richie rolled over. There was a blade gleaming in his hand. He sank the knife into the thing's chest. Blackish liquid exploded around the hilt. The creature arched off the floor, gurgling and twisting. With a grimace Richie stood up. His black jacket was blacker now in some places, wet with blood. He looked down at the twitching form at his feet, reached down, and yanked out the knife. The hilt was slick with black fluid.

Its body began to jerk and twitch as it crumpled, folding in on itself, growing smaller and smaller until it vanished entirely.

Eddie scrambled to his feet, kicking free of the electrical wiring. He began to back away. None of them was paying attention to him. Bill had reached Richie and was holding his arm, pulling at the sleeve, probably trying to get a good look at the wound. Eddie turned to run-and found his way blocked by Ben, whip in hand. The gold length of it was stained with dark fluid. Ben flicked it toward Eddie, and the end wrapped itself around his wrist and jerked tight. Eddie gasped

with pain and surprise.

"You, stupid boy," Ben said bitterly "You could have gotten Richie killed"

Eddie tried to find the right words, but nothing came to his mind, he glanced at the spot where the thing had dissapeared from. There wasn't even a smear of blood.

"They return to their home dimensions when they die," said Richie. "In case you were wondering."

"R-Richie, we s-shouldn't..." Bill speaked.

"Bill, no offense, but I can't take you seriously when you stutter." Richie said rolling his eyes, Bill only stared at the floor. Eddie almost felt bad for him. *Almost*.

"What do you want me to do with him?" said Ben glancing at Eddie coldly.

"Let him go." Richie demanded.

Ben shot him a surprised, almost angry look, but didn't argue. The whip slithered away, freeing Eddie's arm. He rubbed his sore wrist and wondered how the hell he was going to get out of there.

"Maybe we should b-bring him back with us," Bill said. "I bet Keene would like to talk to him."

"No way are we bringing him to the Institute," said Ben. "He's a mundie."

"Or is he?" said Richie softly. His quiet tone was worse than Ben's snapping or Bill's anger. "Have you had dealings with demons, little boy? Walked with warlocks, talked with the Night Children? Have you—"

"What the FUCK are you talking about?" It was the first time in months Eddie had swore out loud, but it felt good. "I don't believe in demons or whatever the f—"

"Eddie!" Eddie recognized that voice, Beverly was standing by the storage room door, Stan was beside her with an angry look on his face. A security guard was with them too.

"Why did you left? Where are the guys with knives you saw?" Beverly asked, she sounded angry but also relieved.

Eddie stared at them, then looked behind him, where Richie, Ben, and Bill stood, Richie still in his bloody shirt with the knife in his hand. He grinned at Eddie and dropped a half-apologetic, half-mocking shrug. Clearly he wasn't surprised that neither Stan nor Beverly nor the bouncer could see them.

Somehow neither was Eddie. Slowly he turned back to Beverly, knowing how he must look to them, standing alone in a damp storage room, his feet tangled in bright plastic wiring cables.

"I thought they went in here," he said lamely. "But I guess they didn't. I'm sorry." he glanced at Stan, whose expression was changing from angry to embarrassed, to the guard, who just looked annoyed. "It was a mistake."

Behind him, Ben laughed.

"Auch!" Eddie touched his left cheek where Beverly had slapped him "Okay, I guess I deserved that."

"Damn right you did." Beverly said, Eddie stared at Stan who had an angry expression on his face, they hadn't spoke a word since they got out of the storage room.

"Stan—" Eddie was about to apologize to him.

"The taxi's here, get in." was all he said before getting in the front seat.

Eddie looked at Beverly who just shrugged and enter the taxi, Eddie followed her, closing the door after his butt touched the back seat.

It was a long ride and nobody said anything, when Eddie was about

to talk to Stan, he just put his headphones on and closed his eyes.

"He's angry." Beverly whispered to him.

"I noticed." Eddie rolled his eyes, Stan never got angry with him, except in eighth grade when Eddie stole his cookies. But that was a totally different Eddie.

"I don't believe you," Beverly said all of the sudden.

Eddie looked at her "Huh?"

Beverly sighed "I don't believe those guys with the knives just disappeared."

Eddie also sighed. "Maybe there weren't any guys with knives, Bev. Maybe I just imagined the whole thing."

"No way." Beverly looked at him in the eyes "I saw your face when we came into that storage room. You looked seriously freaked out, like you'd seen a ghost."

Not a ghost, he thought, something weirder than that.

"It was just a mistake," he said wearily. He wondered why he wasn't telling her the truth. Except, of course, that she'd think he was crazy. And there was something about what had happened—something about the black blood bubbling up around Richie's knife, something about his voice when he'd said *'Have you talked with the Night Children?'* that Eddie wanted to keep to himself. "I doubt they'll ever get us back to Pandemonium anyway".

"What do you care?" Stan said out of nowhere, Eddie was surprised to hear him this angry. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

Eddie stayed quiet, then suddenly the taxi stopped.

"We're here" Beverly said, Eddie looked around and realized she was right, they arrived at his apartment.

The three of them left the taxi, not before Stan paid the driver, and headed to Eddie's apartment.

Eddie suddenly stopped and turned around to stare at Stan, he stared at him back "What?" Stan said annoyed.

"Stan...I know you're upset and I'm so sorry, but—" Eddie was nervous, he could feel te sweat across his forehead.

"But what, Eddie? Did you know that I was so close of calling the police?" Stan looked at him coldly, like Ben did minutes ago.

Beverly kept quiet and stared at her feet.

"I'm s-sorry, Stan," Eddie could feel the tears running through his face "I got scared and..."

"And you think I wasn't?" Stan was now shouting, Eddie almost jumped for the tone of his voice "Eddie, you are my best friend, if something had happened to you I don't know what I could have done —"

Eddie was now hugging him, like his life was depending on it, he missed moments like this with his best friend.

They both could feel another pair of arms around them, Beverly was there too, hugging her two best friends.

"You are both idiots." Beverly said before giggling. Eddie then giggled too and Stan too.

"Thanks, Bev. You too" Stan said smiling "And your cologne smells like oil."

Eddie laughed loudly, louder than ever before.

"Shut up, Uris. You smell like a public bathroom."

"Yep, I've been in your house multiple times." Stan pinched her cheeks and Beverly smacked his arm.

"Guys, I love this moment, but I'm freezing out here." Eddie said, shivering.

"Yeah, we should probably get inside." Beverly said, the three of them

got inside the apartment, now it was the three of them against the world, nothing could come between them.

Or so they thought.

2. Family Secrets

"Mom, why are you doing crunches in the middle of the night?" Eddie looked startled as he watched his mother lying in the living room floor, doing crunches with a exercises program on TV.

"And I thought *my* mother was weird." Beverly whispered to his ear, Stan was beside Beverly covering his mouth, giggling.

Eddie's mother, Sonia Kaspbrak, was on her late thirties, she had the same brown hair her son did, she was almost overweighted. Not that Eddie minded, he encouraged his mother to go to the gym, but Sonia refused. It looked like she wanted to make exercises in her own house. But in this past few months, she'd lost several pounds.

She looked at Eddie with her mouth open for a minute, then closed it.

"Eddie! It's ten o'clock, I was worried!" His mother approached Eddie and hugged him tightly, she then looked at Stan and Beverly. "Are you guys staying? I've got pizza in the fridge if you want some."

"Um, we actually—" Bev started.

"Sure! I'm hungry!" Stan said at the same time.

Bev gave him a look and rolled her eyes, Eddie was just so happy that Stan had forgave him.

"C'mon guys, let's go to my room." Eddie walked to his room, his friends following him.

"Don't lock the door!" They could hear Sonia shouting. Eddie rolled his eyes.

As soon as they entered Eddie's room, he threw himself on the bed, looking at the ceiling.

"What do we do now?" Stan asked, looking around. The walls were painted with a light blue color, on the walls there were a lot of paintings Eddie made.

"Eddie! Did you made this?" Beverly asked pointing to a drawing of the three of them outside his house.

"Uh, yeah..." Eddie looked embarrassed. "It's not that good."

Beverly looked at him with wide eyes "Are you crazy? This is freaking amazing! You even got my forehead pimples from that day."

Stan also looked at the drawing and whistled "Damn, Kaspbrak. I look even better in paper"

"Stan, your ego is bigger than Eddie's mom" Beverly said laughing.

Eddie usually didn't like those kind of jokes but it was Beverly, he didn't mind this time. Stan's phone started to ring, he pulled it out of his back pocket, and looked at the screen.

"Ugh, my mom wants me to get back, she wants us to have a *family dinner*" He said making quoting signs with his fingers.

"Is that a Jewish thing?" Beverly asked, with a funny look on her face.

"I'm Jewish, not some kind of alien." Stan rolled his eyes.

Eddie sat on his bed now. "You kind of are, my friend." Eddie touched Stan's shoulders.

"Yeah, maybe I should go too." Bev nodded her head "Hopefully my dad doesn't realize I left."

Eddie hugged both of his friends and let them at the door.

"If something happens, you call us, okay?" Stan became serious.

"Especially if those ghosts with knives come back" Beverly smirked

Eddie sighed "You're never gonna forget it, are you?"

"Nope" Beverly then kissed his cheek and Stan hugged him and they both left. Eddie closed the door after them.

"This is pointless." Eddie muttered to himself in exasperation. The drawing just wasn't working. With a sigh he tore yet another sheet from his sketchpad, crumpled it up, and tossed it against the light blue wall of his bedroom. Already the floor was littered with discarded balls of paper, a sure sign that his creative juices weren't flowing the way he'd hoped. He wished for the thousandth time that he could be a bit more like his mother. Even if Sonia wasn't good with physical work, whatever she drew, painted, or sketched was beautiful, and lyrical.

The day was bright outside his window but he was too lazy to get out, especially when he was drawing.

Eddie pulled his headphones out—cutting off Hamilton in midsong—and rubbed his aching temples. It was only then that he became aware that the loud, piercing sound of a ringing telephone was echoing through the apartment. Tossing the sketchpad onto the bed, he jumped to his feet and ran into the living room, where the retro-red phone sat on a table near the front door.

"Is this Edward Kaspbrak?" The voice on the other end of the phone sounded familiar, though not immediately identifiable.

Eddie twirled the phone cord nervously around his finger. "Yeees?"

"Hi, I'm one of the knife-carrying sexy guys you met last night in Pandemonium? I'm afraid I made a bad impression and was hoping you'd give me a chance to make it up to—"

"STAN!" Eddie held the phone away from his ear as Stan cracked up laughing. "That is so not funny!"

"Sure it is. You just don't see the humor."

"You're an idiot" Eddie was now smiling. "Where are you anyway? Belch's?"

"Yeah. We just finished up practice." A cymbal clashed behind Stan. Eddie winced. "Belch's doing a poetry reading over at Java Jones tonight," Stan went on, naming a coffee shop around the corner from Eddie's that sometimes had live music at night. "The whole band's

going to go to show their support. Want to come?"

"Yeah, all right." Eddie paused, tugging on the phone cord anxiously. "Wait, no."

"Shut up, guys, will you?" Stan yelled, the faintness of his voice making Eddie suspect that he was holding the phone away from his mouth. He was back a second later, sounding troubled. "Was that a yes or a no?"

"I don't know." Eddie bit his lip. "My mom's kinda mad at me about last night. I'm not sure I want to piss her off by asking for any favors. If I'm going to get in trouble, I don't want it to be on account of Belch's lousy poetry."

"She didn't seem mad last night" Stan said.

"Yeah, but you know her, she calms down when you guys are here"

"Please! Bev will be there too" Stan said. Belch was his next-door neighbor, and the two had known each other most of their lives. They weren't close the way Stan, Eddie and Beverly were, but they had formed a rock band together at the start of sophomore year, along with Belch's friends Patrick and Victor. They practiced together faithfully in Belch's parents' garage every week. "Besides, it's not a favor," Stan added, "it's a poetry slam around the block from your house. It's not like I'm inviting you to some orgy for Pornhub. Your mom can come along if she wants."

"ORGY FOR PORNHUB!" Eddie eard someone, probably Belch, yell. Another cymbal crashed. He imagined his mother listening to Belch read his poetry, and he shuddered inwardly.

"I don't know, she doesn't like those places"

"Come on! I'll take Bev and we'll pick you up. Your mom won't mind. She loves me."

Eddie sighed "She does have a questionable taste, if you ask me"

"Screw you, I'll see you later" Stan clicked off.

Eddie hung up the phone and glanced around the living room. Evidence of his mother's artistic tendencies was everywhere, from the handmade velvet throw pillows piled on the dark red sofa to the walls hung with Sonia's paintings, carefully framed—landscapes, mostly: the winding streets of downtown Manhattan lit with golden light; scenes of Prospect Park in winter, the gray ponds edged with lacelike films of white ice.

On the mantel over the fireplace was a framed photo of Eddie's father. A thoughtful-looking fair man in military dress, his eyes bore the telltale traces of laugh lines at the corners. He'd been a decorated soldier serving overseas. Sonia had some of his medals in a small box by her bed. Not that the medals had done anyone any good when Jonathan Clark had crashed his car into a tree just outside Albany and died before his son was even born.

Sonia had gone back to using her maiden name after he died. She never talked about Eddie's father, but she kept the box engraved with his initials, J. C., next to her bed. Along with the medals were one or two photos, a wedding ring, and a single lock of blond hair.

The door opened with a thump. It was Jim, his arms full of what looked like big square pieces of pasteboard. When he set them down, Eddie saw that they were cardboard boxes, folded flat. He straightened up and turned to Eddie with a smile.

"Hey, Un—hey, Jim," he said sitting on the couch. He'd asked Eddie to stop calling him Uncle Jim about a year ago, claiming that it made him feel old, and anyway reminded him of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Besides, he'd reminded Eddie gently, he wasn't really his uncle, just a close friend of his mother's who'd known her all her life. "Where's Mom?"

"Parking the truck," he said, straightening his lanky frame with a groan. He was dressed in his usual uniform: old jeans, a flannel shirt, and a bent pair of gold-rimmed spectacles that sat askew on the bridge of his nose. "Remind me again why this building has no service elevator?"

"Because it encourages exercise, Jim. You need to stop eating that second box of donuts." He said, giggling.

"What I need is a third box of donuts. Is it here?"

Eddie shook his head. "Nope, I already eat it for breakfast." He said sticking out his tongue.

Jim sighed "If you weren't a kid, I would've kill you."

"I'm not a kid!" Eddie said "I'm almost sixteen." It was true, his birthday was two weeks away. "What are the boxes for?"

Jim's grinned vanished "Your mother wanted to pack up some things," he said, avoiding Eddie's gaze.

"What things?" Eddie asked.

Jim gave an airy wave. "Extra stuff lying around the house. Getting in the way. You know she never throws anything out. So what are you up to? Studying?"

Eddie didn't realize he had a book on his hands, the cover read *'The Picture Of Dorian Gray'*, Stan loved that book, but Eddie hated it.

"Uh, no. School starts in a few weeks, it's my mom's."

Jim just hummed and turned around, he was now rummaging in the tool kit next to the hearth.

"Jim?" Eddie asked.

"Huh?"

"What would you do if you saw something nobody else could see?" Eddie didn't know why he was telling him this, he had a feeling Jim should know.

Jim looked scared for a second. "You mean if I were the only witness to a crime, that sort of thing?"

"No. I mean, if there were other people around, but you were the only one who could see something. As if it were invisible to everyone but you." Eddie was talking quietly, afraid anyone else might hear.

Jim hesitated, still kneeling, the dented tape gun gripped in his hand. "I know it sounds crazy," Eddie ventured nervously, "but ..."

He turned around. His eyes, very blue behind the glasses, rested on her with a look of firm affection. "Eddie, you're an artist, like your mother. That means you see the world in ways that other people don't. It's your gift, to see the beauty and the horror in ordinary things. It doesn't make you crazy—just different. There's nothing wrong with being different."

Eddie was touched by his words, but still wasn't satisfied.

In his mind, he saw the storage room, Ben's gold whip, the blue-haired boy convulsing in his death spasms, and Richie's tawny eyes. *Beauty and horror*. Eddie then proceeded "If my dad had lived, do you think he'd have been an artist too?"

Jim looked taken aback. Before he could answer him, the door swung open and Eddie's mother stalked into the room, her boot heels clacking on the polished wooden floor. She handed Jim a set of jingling car keys and turned to look at her son.

At the moment, Sonia's dark hair was twisted up in a dark red knot, stuck through with a graphite pen to hold it in place. She wore paint-spattered overalls over a lavender T-shirt, and brown hiking boots whose soles were caked with oil paint.

"Mom?" Eddie asked. "What are the boxes for?"

Up close Eddie could see how tired his mother looked. There were dark half-moons under her eyes, and her lids were pearly with sleeplessness.

"Is this about last night?" Eddie asked.

"No," his mother said quickly, and then hesitated. "Maybe a little. You shouldn't have done what you did last night. You know better."

"If you're grounding me, get it over with." Eddie was now confused.

"I'm not," said his mother, "grounding you." Her voice was as taut as a wire. She glanced at Jim, who shook his head.

"Just tell him, Sonia," he said.

"Tell me what?" Eddie demanded.

Sonia expelled a sigh. "We're going on vacation."

Jim's expression went blank, like a canvas wiped clean of paint.

Eddie shook his head. "That's what this is about? You're going on vacation?" He sank back against the cushions. "I don't get it. Why the big production?"

"I don't think you understand. I meant we're *all* going on vacation. The three of us—you, me, and Jim. We're going to the farmhouse."

"Oh" Eddie looked at Jim, who had his arms crossed over his chest, he looked like someone stepped on his foot fingers. "For how long?"

"For the rest of the summer," said his mother. "I brought the boxes in case you want to pack up any books, painting supplies—"

"The *rest* of the summer?" Eddie said with indignation. "I can't do that, Mom. I have plans—my friends and I were going to have a back-to-school party, and I've got a bunch of meetings with my art group, and ten more classes at Tisch—"

"I'm sorry about Tisch. But the other things can be canceled. Stan and Beverly will understand, and so will your art group."

Eddie looked at Jim "Tell her! Tell her it isn't fair!"

Jim shook his head "She's your mother. It's her decision to make."

"I don't get it." Eddie turned back to his mother. "Why?"

"I have to get away, Eddie" Sonia said, the corners of her mouth trembling. "I need the peace, the quiet, to paint. And money is tight right now—"

"So sell some more of Dad's stocks," Eddie said angrily. "You don't care about those!"

His mother closed her eyes. "Eddie—"

"Look, go if you want to go. I don't care. I'll stay here without you. I can work; I can get a job at Starbucks or something. Beverly said they're always hiring. I'm old enough to take care of myself—"

"No!" The sharpness in Sonia's voice made Eddie jump. "You are coming with us. It isn't optional. You're too young to stay here on your own. Something could happen."

"Like what? What could happen?" Eddie demanded.

There was a crash. He turned in surprise to find that Jim had knocked over one of the framed pictures leaning against the wall. Looking distinctly upset, he set it back. When he straightened, his mouth was set in a grim line. "I'm leaving."

Sonia bit her lip. "No, wait..." She hurried after him into the entryway, catching up just as he seized the doorknob. Twisting around on the sofa, Eddie could just overhear his mother's urgent whisper. "...eleven," Sonia was saying. "I've been calling her and calling her for the past three weeks. Her voice mail says she's in Tanzania. What am I supposed to do?"

Jim shook his head. "You can't keep going to her forever"

"But Eddie—"

"Isn't Jonathan." Jim hissed.

What does my father have to do with this? Eddie thought, utterly confused.

"Talk to him, Sonia. I mean it." Jim opened the door and left.

The house stayed quiet for a few minutes.

Ah!!!!!!!!!!!!!!, the sound of a girl screaming came from Eddie's phone in his pants pocket.

"Jesus!" Sonia screamed, a hand in her chest.

"Sorry!" Stan probably changed his ringtone last night when he wasn't looking, that bastard. Stan was calling.

"What's up, Eddie? Did you hear someone screaming?" Stan said with a mocking tone.

"Stan, I swear to God—"

"Don't forget I'm Jewish, we're outside your house." Stan ended the call.

His mother was staring at him. "Eddie, we should talk—"

"I can't," Eddie cut her off, he didn't want to deal with her today. "My friends are here to pick me up."

He just opened the door and closed it after him before his mother could say anything else, he was glad he was wearing decent clothes.

While he was heading downstairs he glanced up, hoping his mother would be there, but no. The door stayed shut.

Eddie's brownstone, like most in Park Slope, had once been the single residence of a wealthy family. Shades of its former grandeur were still evident in the curving staircase, the chipped marble entryway floor, and the wide single-paned skylight overhead. Now the house was split into separate apartments, and Eddie and his mother shared the three-floor building with a downstairs tenant, an elderly woman who ran a psychic's shop out of her apartment. She hardly ever came out of it, though customer visits were infrequent. A gold plaque fixed to the door proclaimed her to be MADAME DOROTHEA, SEERESS AND PROPHETESS.

The door to Madame Dorothea's swung fully open and a girl, around Eddie's age, stepped out. She was tall, with white skin, gold-green eyes like a cat's, and tangled black hair. She grinned at him blindly, showing sharp white teeth.

A wave of dizziness came over Eddie, the strong sensation that he was going to faint.

Outside were standing Stan and Beverly. Stan was wearing a blue

jacket and black jeans, Bev was wearing a white blouse that matched her hair and Jean shorts.

"Hello loser!" They both said at the same time.

When Eddie turned around, the hall was empty. The memory of having seen something teased him, but when he tried to concentrate, it slid away like water.

"Hey guys," he said trying to sound excited. "Let's go."

"Finally!" Beverly said. "I'm hungry."

"What's up with Jim?" Stan asked as the three of them were seating in a small wooden table in a restaurant called 'Yummy Hamburger'

"What do you mean?" Eddie asked as while eating his mini hamburger, Beverly already eat four of them.

"We saw him leave your house, he looked angry. Bev got scared for a minute."

"I did not!" Bev said annoyed.

"Whatever." Stan said and then drank his *Coke*.

"It's just..." Eddie wanted to find the right words to explain whatever the hell happened in his house. "We were fighting, my mom wants me to be at my farmhouse for the rest of vacations."

Beverly had her eyes wide "*What?!*" she shouted, a few costumers shot them angry looks but she ignored them.

"I just can't believe she's being like this," Eddie said more angry than sad now. "Like grounding me every other week wasn't bad enough. Now I'm going to be exiled for the rest of the summer."

"Maybe... She wants to spend more time with you?" Stan asked suddenly curious in the conversation.

"Oh, please, I see her everyday." Eddie rolled his eyes.

"I'm just saying, maybe it isn't that bad, it's not gonna be permanent." Stan said.

"How do you know?" Eddie asked covering his face with his hands.

"Well, because I know your mom," Stan said, after a pause. "I mean, the three of us have been friends for what, ten years now? I know she gets like this sometimes. She'll think better of it."

Eddie picked a hot pepper off his plate and nibbled the edge meditatively. "Do you, though?" he said. "Know her, I mean? I sometimes wonder if anyone does."

Bev now said, "I'm lost now."

Eddie sucked in air to cool his burning mouth. "I mean, she never talks about herself. I don't know anything about her early life, or her family, or much about how she met my dad. She doesn't even have wedding photos. It's like her life started when she had me. That's what she always says when I ask her about it."

"Aw" Beverly said. "That's sweet."

"It's weird." Eddie frowned.

"Maybe her family wasn't nice to her," Stan said. "I've seen the scars"

Eddie was frowning more. "What *scars*?"

"Oh yeah," Beverly agreed. "Those little thin scars. All over her back and her arms. I have seen your mother in a bathing suit, you know."

"I never noticed any scars," Eddie said decidedly. "I think you're imagining things."

"Like you imagined those guys with the knives?" Beverly said back, but she didn't say it in a joking tone.

"I already said I'm sorry—"

Then Stan's phone started to ring.

"It's Belch, the band will start in ten minutes, we have to go" Stan said before leaving some money on the table.

"You don't have to pay for everything" Eddie detached his pockets, but couldn't find one single penny.

"Jewish privileges." Beverly giggled.

"Bev, your Jewish jokes are overused." Stan said grabbing his phone and left the restaurant, Eddie and Beverly followed.

"I have a feeling this will be a fantastic day." Said Beverly, locking arms with Eddie.

"Maybe." Eddie said, suddenly he remembered the Pandemonium. He felt a pair of eyes watching him from behind, he turned around and there he was.

Richie.

He was using the same clothes from that night, but they were clean now. He was waving at him, smirking, as Eddie walked away.

"What is it?" Beverly asked beside him, Eddie looked at her. Beverly had the same expression she had when they found him in the storage room.

He glanced back where Richie stood, but no one was there. He had disappeared.

"Nothing," he said now smiling. "I think it will be a fantastic day too"

Notes for the Chapter:

So.... What did you think of Jim? :V (yeah it's the same Jim from Stranger things, I love him) Btw Eddie's mom is just a normal mom (kinda) :3, and younger and nice (because my bae Eds deserves it)

3. Fear

By the time they got to Java Jones, Belch was already onstage, swaying back and forth in front of the microphone with his eyes squinched shut. He'd dyed the tips of his hair pink for the occasion. Behind him, Victor, looking stoned, was beating irregularly on a drum.

"I take back what I said, this is going to suck so hard," Beverly predicted. She grabbed Eddie's sleeve and tugged him toward the doorway. "If we make a run for it, we can still get away."

"Guys don't be ridiculous," Stan wasn't even looking at them. "I'll bring some food, what do you want?"

Beverly grabbed her stomach. "I ate five hamburgers already, but if you *insist*—"

"Just coffee," Eddie interrupted. "Beverly had enough calories."

"Coffee still has calories." Beverly replied.

"Really?" Eddie was honestly surprised.

Stan sighed. "Well, bad news for both of you, I'm broke."

Eddie frowned, "What? How can you be? You paid for the hamburgers"

Stan nodded, now looking at them. "Well, *this lady*," he said pointing to Beverly, "Made me waste my money on those three extra hamburgers."

"Ugh, whatever. We're gonna find some seats." She grabbed Eddie's arm and walked away from Stan, searching for seats.

The coffee shop was crowded for a Monday; most of the threadbare-looking couches and armchairs were taken up with teenagers and old men. The smell of coffee and clove cigarettes was overwhelming.

Finally Beverly found two unoccupied seats in a darkened corner

toward the back. The only other person nearby was a blond girl in an orange tank top, absorbed in playing with her iPhone. *Good*, Eddie thought, *Belch won't be able to find us back here after the show to ask how his poetry was.*

The blond girl leaned over the side of her chair and tapped Beverly on the shoulder. "Excuse me." Beverly looked up in surprise. "Is that your boyfriend?" the girl asked.

Beverly followed the line of the girl's gaze, already prepared to say, *No, I don't know him*, when she realized the girl meant Stan. He was headed toward them, face scrunched up in concentration. "Uh, no," Beverly said. "He's a friend of mine."

The girl beamed. "He's cute. Does he have a girlfriend?"

Beverly hesitated a second too long before replying. "No."

The girl looked suspicious. "Is he gay?"

Eddie covered his mouth to hide his laugh, Beverly was spared responding to this by Stan's return. The blond girl sat back hastily as Stan looked at Beverly and Eddie as if they were bugs.

"You didn't find a site for me, I see." Stan crossed his arms over his chest.

Beverly shrugged, "Sorry, Uris, three is a crowd."

Stan rolled his eyes. "Whatever, you both are gonna to get ear cancer after listening to Belch."

I should tell him, Eddie thought, though some part of him was strangely reluctant. *I'd be a bad friend if I didn't.* "Don't look now, but that blond girl over there thinks you're cute," he whispered

Stan's eyes flicked sideways to stare at the girl, who was typing furiously on her phone. "The girl in the orange top?" Eddie nodded. Stan looked dubious. "What makes you think so?"

"She was staring at you as if you were made of chocolate." Beverly joined the conversation.

Stan just laughed, Eddie could tell he was blushing. "She doesn't seem like my type."

Eddie narrowed his eyes. "You're not gay, are you?"

Stan was now really *blushing*. "I—" he was interrupted by a burst of feedback. Eddie winced and covered his ears as Belch, onstage, wrestled with his microphone.

"Sorry about that, guys!" he yelled. "All right. I'm Belch, and this is my homeboy Vic on the drums. My first poem is called 'Untitled.'" He screwed up his face as if in pain, and wailed into the mike. "'Come, my faux juggernaut, my nefarious loins! Slather every protuberance with arid zeal!'"

Stan covered his face with his hands. "Please don't tell anyone I know him."

Beverly giggled. "Who uses the word 'loins'?"

Eddie was about to return to his conversation with Stan when he heard someone cough loudly behind him. It was a derisive sort of cough, the kind of noise someone might make who was trying not to laugh out loud.

Eddie turned around.

Sitting on a faded green sofa a few feet away from him was Richie. He was wearing the same dark clothes he'd had on the night before in the club. His arms were bare and covered with faint white lines like old scars. His wrists bore wide metal cuffs; Eddie could see the bone handle of a knife protruding from the left one. He was looking right at Eddie, the side of his narrow mouth quirked in amusement. Worse than the feeling of being laughed at was Eddie's absolute conviction that he hadn't been sitting there five minutes ago.

"What is it?" Stan had followed his gaze, but it was obvious from the blank expression on his face that he couldn't see Richie.

But I see you. Eddie stared at Richie as he thought it, and he raised his left hand to wave at Eddie. A ring glittered on a slim finger. He got to his feet and began walking, unhurriedly, toward the door. Eddie's lips

parted in surprise. Richie was leaving, just like that.

He felt Beverly's hand on his arm. She was saying his name, asking him if something was wrong. He had barely heard her. "I'll be right back," he heard himself say, as he sprang off the couch. He raced toward the door, leaving Stan and Beverly staring at each other, with confused looks on their faces.

Eddie burst through the doors, terrified that Richie would have vanished into the alley shadows like a ghost. But he was there, slouched against the wall. He had just taken something out of his pocket and was punching buttons on it. He looked up in surprise as the door of the coffee shop fell shut behind Eddie.

"Your friend's poetry is terrible" Was all Richie said.

Eddie blinked, caught momentarily off guard. "Belch is not my friend. Why the hell are you following me?"

"Who said I was following you? I actually like the smell of fresh coffee in the morning, you're not really that interes—"

"Cut the crap!" Eddie was now shouting. "Should I call the police now?"

"And tell them what?" Richie said witheringly. "That invisible people are bothering you? Trust me, little boy, the police aren't going to arrest someone they can't see."

"God, you're annoying." Eddie shook his head..

Richie raised his eyebrows, "Me? Have you heard yourself talk? You sound like the fairies in the Fair Folk."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You don't know much, do you?" he said. There was a lazy contempt in his gold eyes. "You seem to be a mundane like any other mundane, yet you can see me. It's strange."

"What is a *mundane*?"

"Someone of the human world. Someone like you."

"But you're human," Eddie said.

"I am," he said. "But I'm not like you." There was no defensiveness in his tone. He sounded like he didn't care if Eddie believed him or not.

"You're full of yourself! You act like you're better than anyone"

"I'm not better than *anyone*" Richie rolled his eyes. "I'm just better than *you*"

"*Fuck* you" Second time Eddie used that word out loud.

"Keene told me you may be dangerous, but really... You're like a lost Chihuahua, if you were dangerous you certainly don't know it"

"I'm dangerous?" Eddie echoed in astonishment. "I saw you kill someone last night. I saw you drive a knife up under his ribs, and—" *And I saw him slash at you with fingers like razor blades. I saw you cut and bleeding, and now you look as if nothing ever touched you.*

"At least I know who I am, do you?" Richie got closer to him.

"I'm an ordinary human being, just like you said. Who's Keene?"

"My tutor. And I wouldn't be so quick to brand myself as ordinary, if I were you." He leaned forward. "Let me see your right hand."

"Why?" Eddie was frowning.

"Let me *see* it" Richie demanded.

Eddie held out his right hand grudgingly. It looked pale in the half-light spilling from the windows, the knuckles dotted with a light dusting of freckles. Somehow he felt as exposed as if he were pulling up his shirt and showing him his pale chest. Richie took his hand and turned it over. "Nothing." He sounded almost disappointed.

"Why did you need my hand?"

Richie shrugged, "Most Shadowhunter children get Marked on their right hands—or left, if they're left-handed like I am—when they're still young. It's a permanent rune that lends an extra skill with weapons." He showed him the back of his left hand; it looked like some kind of tattoo.

"A tattoo?"

"A *Mark*, burned in our skins." He smiled and lowered his hand.

"What do they do?"

"Different Marks do different things. Some are permanent but the majority vanish when they've been used." Richie stared at the sky, "We should go"

"I'm not going anywhere with you" Eddie was about to leave but Richie grabbed his arm.

"Keene said I have to bring you to the Institute with me. He wants to talk to you." His cocky face was gone, now he was all serious.

"Well I don't." Eddie was getting scared.

"That's your problem. You can come either willingly or unwillingly."

"Excuse me?" Eddie was shocked. *This psycho wanted to kidnap him.* He opened his mouth to protest angrily, but was interrupted by a strident buzzing noise. His phone was ringing.

"Go ahead and answer that if you like," Richie said generously.

The phone stopped ringing, then started up again, loud and insistent. Eddie frowned—his mom must really be freaking out. He half-turned away from Richie and began digging in his pockets. By the time he unlocked the phone, it was on its third sets of rings.

He raised to his ear. "Mom, I'm coming home—"

"NO!" Terror scraped Sonia's voice raw, "Don't you dare come home. Go to Stan's. Go straight to Stan's house and stay there until I can—" A noise in the background interrupted her: the sound of something

falling, shattering, something heavy striking the floor—

"Mom!" Eddie shouted into the phone. "Mom, are you all right?"

"Just promise me you won't come home. Go to Stan's and call Jim—tell him that he's found me—" there were glass shattering noises in the background.

"Mom!" Eddie was still shouting. "What's happening? Who found you? Are you—"

"I love you, Eddie" his mom's voice was calmer this time.

The phone went dead.

"Next time remind me to bring my headphones, please." Beverly was rubbing her temples.

"I don't think there's gonna be a next time, people *begged* for Belch to get off the stage." Stan was laughing quietly.

"I agree with them." Beverly was standing up now, looking at the place, everyone was leaving.

"Where did Eddie go?" She was confused. Eddie left for ten minutes and still hadn't returned.

"He probably has gas." Stan now exploded in laughter.

Beverly rolled her eyes, smiling. "Well, he got it from you then."

"C'mon let's go outside, he probably is there talking to himself." Stan shrugged.

Bev sighed and followed him outside, she could see Belch crying of embarrassment but she didn't really care, she barely knew him.

"He's not here, maybe he—" Beverly didn't finish because someone pushed her making her lose balance. Someone, *really short*. Eddie.

"Eddie!" Stan shouted, but Eddie was already far away from them.

"Mom!" Eddie shrieked into the phone. "Mom, are you there?" CALL ENDED, the screen said. *But why would his mother have hung up like that?*

"Eddie," Richie said. It was the first time Eddie had ever heard him say his name. "What's going on?"

Eddie ignored him. Feverishly he hit the button that dialed his home number. There was no answer except a double-tone busy signal.

Eddie's hands had begun to shake uncontrollably. When he tried to redial, the phone slipped out of his shaking grasp and hit the pavement hard. He dropped to his knees to retrieve it, but it was dead, a long crack visible across the front. "Dammit!" Almost in tears, he threw the phone down.

"Hey," Richie knelt beside him. "Did something happen?"

"Give me your phone," Eddie said, grabbing the black metal out of Richie's shirt pocket. "I have to—"

"It's not a phone," Richie said, making no move to get it back. "It's a Sensor. You won't be able to use it."

"But I need to call the police!"

"Tell me what happened first. I can help you."

But Eddie wasn't listening to him, his heart was beating fast, all he could think about was that his mother was in danger. Without even thinking about it, he started to run. He collided with someone but he didn't care.

When he reached the street, he spun around, half-expecting to see Richie following him. But the alley was empty. For a moment he stared uncertainly into the shadows. Nothing moved inside them. He spun on his heel and ran for home.

Eddie didn't know what time it was, but he kept running, his house was close.

At the corner of his block, Eddie got trapped at a DON'T WALK sign. He jittered up and down impatiently on the balls of his feet while traffic whizzed by in a blur of headlights. He tried to call home again, but Richie hadn't been lying; his phone wasn't a phone. At least, it didn't look like any phone Eddie had ever seen before. The Sensor's buttons didn't have numbers on them, just more of those bizarre symbols, and there was no screen.

Jogging up the street toward his house, he saw that the second-floor windows were lit, the usual sign that his mother was home. *Okay*, he told himself. *Everything's fine*. But his stomach tightened the moment he stepped into the entryway. The overhead light had burned out, and the foyer was in darkness. The shadows seemed full of secret movement. Shivering, he started upstairs.

"And just where do you think you're going?" said a voice.

Eddie whirled. "What—"

He broke off. His eyes were adjusting to the dimness, and he could see the shape of a large armchair, drawn up in front of Madame Dorothea's closed door. The old woman was wedged into it like an overstuffed cushion. In the dimness Eddie could see only the round shape of her powdered face, the white lace fan in her hand, the dark, yawning gap of her mouth when she spoke. "Your mother," Dorothea said, "has been making a god-awful noise up there. What's she doing? Moving furniture?"

"I don't think—"

"And the stairwell light's burned out, did you notice?" Dorothea rapped her fan against the arm of the chair. "Can't your mother get her boyfriend in to change it?"

"Jim's not—"

"The skylight needs washing too. It's filthy. No wonder it's nearly pitch-black in here."

Jim is not a freaking landlord, he wanted to scream, but didn't. He was only focused on his mother.

Eddie sighed. "I'll ask."

"You'd better." Dorothea snapped her fan shut with a flick of her wrist.

Eddie's sense that something was wrong only increased when he reached the apartment door. It was unlocked, hanging slightly open, spilling a wedge-shaped shaft of light onto the landing. With a feeling of increasing panic he pushed the door open.

Inside the apartment the lights were on, all the lamps, everything turned up to full brightness. The glow stabbed into his eyes. His mother's keys and pink handbag were on the small wrought-iron shelf by the door, where she always left them. "Mom?" Eddie called out. "Mom, I'm home."

There was no reply. He went into the living room. Both windows were open, yards of gauzy white curtains blowing in the breeze like restless ghosts. Only when the wind dropped and the curtains settled did Eddie see that the cushions had been ripped from the sofa and scattered around the room. Some were torn lengthwise, cotton innards spilling onto the floor. The bookshelves had been tipped over, their contents scattered. The piano bench lay on its side, gaping open like a wound, Sonia's beloved music books spewing out.

Most terrifying were the paintings. Every single one had been cut from its frame and ripped into strips, which were scattered across the floor. It must have been done with a knife—canvas was almost impossible to tear with your bare hands. The empty frames looked like bones picked clean. Eddie felt a scream rising up in his chest. "Mom!" he shrieked. "Where are you? Mommy!"

He hadn't called Sonia "Mommy" since he was eight.

Heart pumping, he raced into the kitchen. It was empty, the cabinet doors open, a smashed bottle of Tabasco sauce spilling peppery red liquid onto the linoleum. His knees felt like bags of water. He knew he should race out of the apartment, get to a phone, call the police.

But all those things seemed distant—

Mom, he was almost crying, What happened to you?

Silence answered him. No, not silence—a noise sounded through the apartment. Like something being knocked over—a heavy object striking the floor with a dull thud. The thud was followed by a dragging, slithering noise—and it was coming toward the bedroom. Stomach contracting in terror, Eddie scrambled to his feet and turned around slowly.

For a moment he thought the doorway was empty, and he felt a wave of relief. Then he looked down.

It was crouched against the floor, a long, scaled creature with a cluster of flat black eyes set dead center in the front of its domed skull. Something like a cross between an alligator and a centipede, it had a thick, flat snout and a barbed tail that whipped menacingly from side to side. Multiple legs bunched underneath it as it readied itself to spring.

Eddie was too shocked to actually scream, he scrambled to his feet and ran toward the hallway, but the thing was too fast for him.

It sprang again, landing just above the door, where it hung like a gigantic malignant spider, staring down at him with its cluster of eyes. Its jaws opened slowly, showing a row of fanged teeth spilling greenish drool. A long black tongue flickered out between its jaws as it gurgled and hissed. To his horror, Eddie realized that the noises it was making were words.

"Eat, eat, eat..." It kept saying. With a voice so terrifying that Eddie was almost sure he had wet his pants.

The thing was on its feet now, crawling toward him. Backing away, he seized a heavy framed photo off the bureau beside him—himself and his mother and Jim at Coney Island, about to go on the bumper cars—and flung it at the monster.

The photograph hit its midsection and bounced off, striking the floor with the sound of shattering glass. The creature didn't seem to notice.

It came on toward him, broken glass splintering under its feet. "Bones, to crunch, to suck out the marrow, to drink the veins ..."

Eddie's back hit the wall. He could back up no farther. He felt a movement against his hip and nearly jumped out of his skin. His pocket. Plunging his hand inside, he drew out the plastic thing he'd taken from Richie. The Sensor was shuddering, like a cell phone set to vibrate. The hard material was almost painfully hot against his palm. He closed his hand around the Sensor just as the creature sprang.

As the creature lunged for his face, jaws wide, he jammed the Sensor between its teeth and felt hot, acidic drool coat his wrist and spill in burning drops onto the bare skin of his face and throat. As if from a distance, he could hear himself screaming.

Looking almost surprised, the creature jerked back, the Sensor lodged between two teeth. It growled, a thick angry buzz, and threw its head back. Eddie saw it swallow, saw the movement of its throat. *I'm next*, he thought, panicked. *I'm—*

Suddenly the thing began to twitch. Spasming uncontrollably, it rolled off Eddie and onto its back, multiple legs churning the air. Black fluid poured from its mouth.

Gasping for air, Eddie rolled over and started to scramble away from the thing. He'd nearly reached the door when he heard something whistle through the air next to his head. He tried to duck, but it was too late. An object slammed heavily into the back of his skull, and he collapsed forward into blackness.

4. The Institute

Notes for the Chapter:

Omg, I'm updating this so fast lmao, I need a life
=_=

Light stabbed through his eyelids, blue, white, and red. There was a high wailing noise, rising in pitch like the scream of a terrified child. Eddie gagged and opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was the night sky, he was lying on a patch of grass behind Sonia's carefully tended rosebushes. The foliage partially hid his view of the street, where a police car, its blue-and-white light bar flashing, was pulled up to the curb, siren wailing. Already a small knot of neighbors had gathered, staring as the car door opened and two blue-uniformed officers emerged.

The police. He tried to sit up, and gagged again, fingers spasming into the damp earth.

"Don't move." Eddie turned his head and saw Richie kneeling beside him.

"That Ravener demon got you in the back of the neck." Richie's voice was calm, "It was half-dead so it wasn't much of a sting, but we have to get you to the Institute. Hold still." Richie's hands were gentle as he slipped a strip of knotted cloth under Eddie's neck, and tied it. It was smeared with something waxy, like the gardener's salve his mother used to keep her paint- and turpentine-abused hands soft.

"The t-t-thing, at P-Pandemonium—" Eddie whispered, he didn't have much strength to talk out loud.

"It was an Eidolon demon. A shape-changer. Ravens look like they look. Not very attractive, but they're too stupid to care."

"That t-thing said it was going to eat me..." Everything around Eddie was starting to get blurry.

"But it didn't. You killed it." Richie finished the knot and sat back.

To Eddie's relief, the pain in the back of his neck had faded. He hauled himself into a sitting position. "The police are here." His voice came out like a frog's croak. "We should—"

"There's nothing they can do. Somebody probably heard you screaming and reported it. Ten to one those aren't real police officers. Demons have a way of hiding their tracks." Richie looked around.

"My mom," Eddie said, forcing the words through his swollen throat.

"There's Ravener poison coursing through your veins right now. You'll be dead in an hour if you don't come with me" Richie got to his feet and held out a hand to him. Eddie took it and he pulled him upright. "Come on."

The world tilted. Richie slid a hand across his back, holding him steady. He smelled of dirt, blood, and metal. "Can you walk?"

No, Eddie thought. "I think so." He glanced through the densely blooming bushes. He could see the police coming up the path. One of them, a slim blond woman, held a flashlight in one hand. As she raised it, Eddie saw the hand was fleshless, a skeleton hand sharpened to bone points at the fingertips. "Her hand—"

"I told you they might be demons." Riche glanced at the back of the house. "We have to get out of here. Can we go through the alley?"

Eddie shook his head. "It's bricked up. There's no way—" His words dissolved into a fit of coughing. He raised his hand to cover his mouth. It came away red. He whimpered.

Richie grabbed his wrist, turned it over so the white, vulnerable flesh of his inner arm lay bare under the moonlight. Traceries of blue vein mapped the inside of Eddie's skin, carrying poisoned blood to his heart, his brain.

Eddie felt his knees buckle. There was something in Richie's hand, something sharp and silver. Eddie tried to pull his hand back, but Richie's grip was too hard: He felt a stinging kiss against his skin. When he let go, Eddie saw an inked black symbol, like the ones that covered Richie's skin, just below the fold of Eddie's wrist. This one

looked like a set of overlapping circles.

"What's that supposed to do?"

"It'll hide you," Richie said. "Temporarily." He slid the thing Eddie had thought was a knife back into his belt. It was a long, luminous cylinder, as thick around as an index finger and tapering to a point. "My stele," he said.

Eddie didn't know what the hell that was, but he didn't have the strength to actually ask.

"Richie," he mumbled and felt as if he was falling, Richie caught him and swung Eddie up into his arms, but even Richie's arms were not enough to keep him from falling.

When Beverly and Stan got to Eddie's house, everything was quiet, it seemed like the street was empty.

"What the hell?" Stan whispered to himself.

"Eddie!" Beverly shouted as they entered the building, but no one answered.

They started to go upstairs, and Stan could already feel something was wrong. When Eddie left suddenly, it felt like that night in Pandemonium all over again. Stan's heart was beating fast, he could feel Beverly was as scared as him.

"Stan..." Beverly said looking inside he apartment, Stan was as shocked as Beverly was.

The nice organized apartment Stan and Beverly used to mock about was... *destroyed*.

Literally, the paints Sonia made were on the floor, the TV was smashed in the ground. Eddie's room door was broken, all of his drawings on the floor.

"Eddie!" Beverly shouted, her voice breaking. Stan was perplexed,

watching everything with wide eyes.

Beverly pulled out her phone and started dialing a number. "Y-yes, I think there was an accident...My friend's house is destroyed—" Beverly was almost crying on the phone.

"No! It's not a fucking joke—" Stan could hear the there line hanging up.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" Beverly was in tears now, Stan put a hand on her shoulder.

"Bev, Bev...Listen, we need to search for Eddie. We're going to find him, all right?" Stan wasn't so sure now.

Bev hugged him, and started sobbing. "What if we don't? What if—"

"No," Stan said "We're going to find him, and then we're gonna kill that son of a bitch who did this."

"You think he'll ever wake up? It's been three days already."

"You have to give him time. Demon p-poison is strong stuff, and he's a mundane. He hasn't got runes to k-keep him strong like we do."

"He's not even attractive."

"B-Ben!"

Three days, Eddie thought slowly. All his thoughts ran as thickly and slowly as blood or honey. *I have to wake up.*

But he couldn't.

The dreams held him, one after the other, a river of images that bore him along like a leaf tossed in a current. He saw his mother lying in a hospital bed, eyes like bruises in her white face. He saw Jim, standing atop a pile of bones. Richie with white feathered wings sprouting out of his back, Beverly sitting on the sand using a long white dress, Stan with crosses burned into the palms of his hands. Angels, falling and

burning. Falling out of the sky.

"I t-told you it was the same boy."

"I know. Little thing, isn't he? Richie said he killed a Ravener."

"Yeah. I thought h-he was a some kind of fairie the first time we s-saw him."

"I still think he's not that attractive."

"Nobody looks their b-best with demon poison in their veins. So Keene going to call on the Brothers?"

"I hope not, they give me the creeps."

"Sometimes I w-wonder if Richie—Look! He moved!"

"I guess he's alive after all" A sigh. "I'll tell Keene."

Eddie's eyelids felt as if they had been sewed shut. He imagined he could feel tearing skin as he peeled them slowly open and blinked for the first time in three days. He realized he was staring at an arched wooden ceiling.

He glanced around. He was tucked into a linen-sheeted bed, one of a long row of similar beds with metal headboards, the bed had a small nightstand beside it with a white pitcher and cup on it. Lace curtains were pulled across the windows, blocking the light, although he could hear the faint, ever-present New York sounds of traffic coming from outside.

"Damn, you look like you've been sleeping for days." Said a dry voice. "Oh *wait... You were.*"

Eddie turned, at first he didn't recognize the boy sitting on the next bed, then it was like his brain punched him in the face and then remembered. *Ben.*

He wasn't wearing those black leather clothes he had that night in

Pandemonium. Ben was using a simple red t-shirt and jeans, he looked like a normal teenager. Ben's eyes looked at Eddie with boredom.

"Thanks for the information" Eddie's voice rasped like sandpaper. "Is this the Institute?"

Ben rolled his eyes. "Is there anything Richie didn't tell you?"

Eddie blinked. "You didn't answer my question."

"Yes, little boy, this is the Institute. You're in the infirmary."

"My name is Eddie, and don't call me *little boy*, we're the same age," Eddie coughed.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Keene said to give you this when you woke up." Ben grabbed for the ceramic pitcher and poured some of the contents into the matching cup, which he handed to Eddie. It was full of a cloudy liquid that steamed slightly. It smelled like herbs and something else, something rich and dark. "You haven't eaten anything in three days," Ben pointed out. "That's probably why you feel sick."

Eddie gingerly took a sip. It was delicious, rich and satisfying with a buttery aftertaste. "What is this?"

Ben shrugged. "One of Keene's tisanes. They always work." Ben slid off the bed, landing on the floor with a catlike arch of his back. "I'm Ben Denbrough by the way. Formerly, *Ben Hanscom*. I live here."

"Why did you changed your last name?" Eddie felt better now but his legs still were hurting a little.

"Not my choice," Ben said. "The Denbrough family adopted me nine years ago, after my biological parents died" He said it like it was nothing, although Eddie could see his lip trembling when he said the last part.

"I'm sorry." Eddie supposed that's what you say to an orphan person.

"It's fine, the Denbroughs love me as one of their own." Ben played

with his fingers.

"Did Richie brought me here?" Eddie wanted to change the subject.

Ben nodded. "Keene was furious. You got blood all over the carpet in the entryway. If he'd done it while my *parents* were here, he'd have gotten grounded for sure." He looked at Eddie more narrowly. "Richie said you killed that Ravener demon all by yourself."

"I, don't remember" It was true. But part of him wanted to brag in front of this boy. "I guess I did."

"But you're human."

"Amazing, isn't it?" Eddie said, savoring the look of thinly disguised amazement on Ben's face. "Where is Richie?"

Ben shrugged. "Somewhere," he said. "I should go tell everyone you're up. Keene'll want to talk to you."

"He's Richie's tutor, right?"

"Keene tutors us all." He pointed. "The bathroom's through there, and I hung some of my old clothes on the towel rack in case you want to change."

Eddie set the cup down and hugged the sheet around himself. "What happened to *my* clothes?"

"They were covered in blood and poison. Richie burned them."

"He *burned* my clothes?!" Eddie almost shouted. "Is he always really rude, or does he save that for mundanes?"

"He's rude to everyone," Ben said airily. "That's why girls think he's so sexy, I just think he's an idiot."

"One thing we agree on." Eddie said, almost smiling to this *almost* stranger. "Wait, he's your brother, right?"

That got Ben attention. He laughed out loud. "Richie? My brother? No. Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Well, he lives here with you," Eddie pointed out. "Doesn't he?"

Ben nodded. "Well, yes, but ..."

"Why doesn't he live with his own parents?"

Ben looked uncomfortable. "Because they're dead too."

Eddie's mouth opened in surprised. "Did they die the same way yours did?"

When Ben didn't answer right away, Eddie asked, "Was it... demons?"

Ben got to his feet. "Look, I'd better let everyone know you've woken up. They've been waiting for you to open your eyes for three days. Oh, and there's soap in the bathroom," he added. "You might want to clean up a little. You smell."

Eddie glared at him, it was obvious that this subject was hurting him. He didn't know why Ben was hiding his pain. "Thanks a lot." He said.

"Any time, Eddie."

Ben's clothes looked ridiculous. Eddie had to roll the legs on the jeans up several times before he stopped tripping on them and the green t-shirt was almost touching his knees.

He cleaned up in the small bathroom, using a bar of hard lavender soap. A few minutes ago, when he was showering, every memory of the days before came with a flash, the fight in the kitchen, Richie outside the Java Jones, the demon attacking him on his house, even the blonde girl who was eating Stan with her eyes.

Stan. Eddie thought. *Beverly.*

The last time he saw them, they were at Java Jones listening to Belch's awful poetry.

Oh, God. They're probably worried right now. He thought.

He dried himself with a white towel hanged on the wall. *I have to call Jim*, he thought. Surely there was a phone around here somewhere. Maybe they'd let him use it after he talked to Keene.

He found his sneakers under the bed, thanking Richie for not burning them, because they were expensive.

He took a deep breath and left to find Ben.

The corridor outside the infirmary was empty. Eddie glanced down it, perplexed. It looked like the sort of hallway he sometimes found himself racing down in nightmares, shadowy and infinite. Glass lamps blown into the shapes of roses hung at intervals on the walls, and the air smelled like dust and candle wax.

In the distance he could hear a faint and delicate noise, like wind chimes shaken by a storm. He set off down the corridor slowly, trailing a hand along the wall. The Victorian-looking wallpaper was faded with age, burgundy and pale gray. Each side of the corridor was lined with closed doors.

The sound he was following grew louder. Now he could identify it as the sound of a piano being played with desultory but undeniable skill, though he couldn't identify the tune.

Turning the corner, he came to a doorway, the door propped fully open. Peering in, he saw what was clearly a music room. A grand piano stood in one corner, and rows of chairs were arranged against the far wall. A covered harp occupied the center of the room.

Richie was seated at the grand piano, his slender hands moving rapidly over the keys. He was barefoot, dressed in jeans and a gray T-shirt, his black hair ruffled up around his head as if he'd just woken up. Watching the quick, sure movements of his hands across the keys, Eddie remembered how it had felt to be lifted up by those hands, his arms holding him up and the stars hurtling down around his head.

"It's not polite to stare." Richie said, without looking at Eddie.

Eddie almost jumped but crossed his arms instead. "I wasn't staring, I just arrived."

"Did Ben kissed you awake?"

"I woke up on my own."

"What are you doing here, anyway?" Richie was now looking at him.

"Ben went off to get Keene. He told me to wait but—"

"But you never do what you're told, I know" Richie was standing. "Are those Ben's clothes? They look ridiculous on you."

"You *burned* my clothes."

"It was purely precautionary." He slid the gleaming black piano cover closed. "Come on, I'll take you to Keene."

The Institute was huge, a vast cavernous space that looked less like it had been designed according to a floor plan and more like it had been naturally hollowed out of rock by the passage of water and years. Through half-open doors Eddie glimpsed countless identical small rooms, each with a stripped bed, a nightstand, and a large wooden wardrobe standing open. Pale arches of stone held up the high ceilings, many of the arches intricately carved with small figures. He noticed certain repeating motifs: angels and swords, suns and roses.

"Why does this place have so many bedrooms?" Eddie asked. "I thought it was a research institute."

"This is the residential wing. We're pledged to offer safety and lodging to any Shadowhunter who requests it. We can house up to two hundred people here."

"But most of these rooms are empty."

"People come and go. Nobody stays for long. Usually it's just us: Bill, Ben, Georgie, their parents—and me and Keene."

"Georgie?..."

"Bill's little brother, and Ben's adoptive brother as well, I'm pretty sure he told you about that—"

"Yeah, he told me." Eddie suddenly remembered Ben's broken face when he said it.

"Anyway, Georgie is overseas with his parents."

"On vacation?"

"Not exactly." Richie hesitated. "Right now they're in the Shadowhunter home country, working out some very delicate peace negotiations. They brought Georgie with them because he's so young."

"Shadowhunter home country?" Eddie's head was spinning. "What's it called?"

"Derry."

"I've never heard of it."

"You wouldn't have." That irritating superiority was back in his voice. "Mundanes don't know about it. There are wardings—protective spells—up all over the borders. If you tried to cross into Derry, you'd simply find yourself transported instantly from one border to the next. You'd never know what happened."

"So it's not on any maps?" Eddie was really curious about all of this."

"Not mundie ones. For our purposes you can consider it a small country between Germany and France."

"I take it you've been there. To Derry I mean."

"I grew up there." Richie's voice was neutral, but something in his tone let Eddie know that more questions in that direction would not be welcome. "Most of us do. There are, of course, Shadowhunters all over the world. We have to be everywhere, because demonic activity is everywhere. But to a Shadowhunter, Derry is always 'home.'"

"Ben told me that your parents—"

Richie suddenly said, "This is the library."

Eddie was surprised that Richie had interrupted him, he decided not to bring the subject up. For now.

They had reached an arch-shaped set of wooden doors. An orange cat with green eyes lay curled in front of them. It raised its head as they approached and yowled. "Hey, Mews," Richie said, stroking the cat's back with a bare foot. The cat slit its eyes in pleasure.

"Wait," Eddie said. "Bill and Ben and Georgie—they're the only Shadowhunters your age that you know, that you spend time with?"

Richie stopped stroking the cat. "Yes."

"That must get kind of lonely."

"I have everything I need." He pushed the doors open. After a moment's hesitation, Eddie followed him inside.

The library was circular, with a ceiling that tapered to a point, as if it had been built inside a tower. The walls were lined with books, the shelves so high that tall ladders set on casters were placed along them at intervals. Eddie stared at the books shelved in them, they were all black and organized by length.

The floor was polished wood, inlaid with chips of glass and marble and bits of semiprecious stone. The inlay formed a pattern that Eddie couldn't quite decipher—it might have been the constellations, or even a map of the world; he suspected he'd have to climb up into the tower and look down in order to see it properly.

In the center of the room sat a magnificent desk. It was carved from a single slab of wood, a great, heavy piece of oak that gleamed with the dull shine of years. The slab rested upon the backs of two angels, carved from the same wood, their wings gilded and their faces engraved with a look of suffering, as if the weight of the slab were breaking their backs. Behind the desk sat a thin man with gray-streaked hair and a long beaky nose.

"A book lover, I see," The man smiled at Eddie. "You didn't tell me that, Richie"

Richie chuckled. Eddie could tell that Richie had come up behind him and was standing there with his hands in his pockets, grinning that infuriating grin of his.

"We didn't really talk about book preferences."

Eddie turned around and shot him a glare.

"How can you tell?" he asked the man behind the desk. "That I like books, I mean."

"The look on your face when you walked in," he said, standing up and coming around from behind the desk. "Somehow I doubted you were that impressed by *me*."

Eddie stifled a gasp as the man rose. For a moment it seemed to him that the man was strangely misshapen, his left shoulder humped and higher than the other. As he approached, Eddie saw that the hunch was actually a bird, perched neatly on his shoulder—a glossy feathered creature with bright black eyes.

"This is Gard," the man said touching the bird in his shoulder. "Gard is a raven, and, as such, he knows many things. I, meanwhile, am Norbert Keene, a professor of history, and, as such, I do not know nearly enough."

Eddie laughed a little, despite himself, and shook his outstretched hand. "Eddie Kaspbrak."

"Honored to make your acquaintance," he said. "I would be honored to make the acquaintance of anyone who could kill a Ravener with his bare hands."

"It wasn't my bare hands." It still felt odd to be congratulated for killing something. "It was Richie's *thing*—"

"My Sensor," Richie interrupted. "He shoved it down the thing's throat. The runes must have choked it. I guess I'll need another one," he added, almost as an afterthought. "I should have mentioned that."

"There are several extra in the weapons room," said Keene. When he smiled at Eddie, a thousand small lines rayed out from around his

eyes, like the cracks in an old painting. "That was quick thinking. What gave you the idea of using the Sensor as a weapon?"

"It was just... the first thing that came to my mind."

A sharp cough sounded through the room. Eddie had been so enraptured by the books and distracted by Hodge that he hadn't seen Bill sprawled in an overstuffed red armchair by the empty fireplace. "I haven't introduced m-myself" he said.

When Bill got closer he could see him clearly now, he was tall, taller than Richie. He was using a black jacket and leather pants, but Eddie was distracted by his sparkling blue eyes, auburn straight hair, a pale, high-colored skin. He was *cute*. *Wait, what?*

"Bill Denbrough." He said raising his right hand, although he gave Eddie an expression that he wasn't comfortable with this situation.

"Eddie." Eddie shook Bill's hand, it was cold, like the kind of winter anyone disliked.

"Keene, can I talk to you for a second?" Bill asked, Keene nodded. Bill got closer to Keene and started whispering to him.

"I still think it isn't right for him to b-be here," Bill was saying quietly, but Eddie could hear him. He rolled his eyes. *"He's a mundane, if anyone knew about this, we could be reported to the Clave."*

"You can talk more loudly if you want, I can hear you." Eddie was annoyed.

Richie chuckled in the background.

Bill just looked at him, his face was red as Ben's t-shirt.

Keene was the first to speak. "The Law does allow us to offer sanctuary to mundanes in certain circumstances. A Ravener has already attacked Eddie's mother-he could well have been next."

"But he's human-" Bill was starting to bother Eddie now.

"So what? I just killed a demon in my own house, and you're going to

be a dickhead about it because I'm not some spoiled-rotten rich brat like you and your *brother*?" He didn't know where all the aggression came from, he just didn't like people talking behind his back.

Richie looked at Eddie in surprise. "Whoa-"

"What the hell is your problem?" Bill was still red, but it was from anger now.

Richie was chuckling. "Eds, you got some *balls*."

"It's not f-funny, Richie," Bill interrupted, starting to his feet. "Are you just going to let him stand there and call me names?"

"Yes," Richie said kindly. "It'll do you good-try to think of it as endurance training."

"We may be *parabatai*," Bill said tightly. "But your f-flippancy is wearing on my patience."

"Kids," Keene intervened. "Please, don't fight."

"Ugh," Bill said. "Raveners are search-and-destroy m-machines, they act under orders from warlocks or powerful d-demon lords. Now, what interest would a warlock or demon lord have in an ordinary m-mundane household?" His eyes when he looked at Eddie were bright with dislike. "Any thoughts?"

Eddie rolled his eyes. "No."

"It is extremely unusual for a powerful demon, the kind who might command a host of lesser demons, to interest himself in the affairs of human beings," Keene said. "No mundane may summon a demon-they lack that power-but there have been some, desperate and foolish, who have found a witch or warlock to do it for them."

"My mother doesn't know any warlocks. She doesn't believe in magic." A thought occurred to Eddie. "Madame Dorothea- she lives downstairs-she's a witch. Maybe the demons were after her and got my mom by mistake?"

Keene's eyebrows shot up into his hair. "A *witch* lives downstairs from

you?"

"She's a hedge-witch-a fake," Richie said. "I already looked into it. There's no reason for any warlock to be interested in her unless he's in the market for nonfunctional crystal balls."

"And we're back where we began." Keene reached up to stroke the bird on his shoulder. "It seems the time has come to notify the Clave."

"No!" Richie said. "We can't-"

"It made sense to keep Eddie's presence here a secret while we were not sure he would recover," Keene said. "But now he has, and he is the first mundane to pass through the doors of the Institute in over a hundred years. You know the rules about mundane knowledge of Shadowhunters, Richie. The Clave must be informed."

"Absolutely," Bill agreed. "I could get a message to my f-father-"

"He's not a mundane," Richie said quietly.

Keene's eyebrows shot back up to his hairline and stayed there. Bill, caught in the middle of a sentence, choked with surprise. In the sudden silence Eddie could hear the sound of Gard's wings rustling. "But I am," Eddie said.

"No," said Richie. "You aren't." He turned to Keene, and Eddie saw the slight movement of his throat as he swallowed. Eddie found this glimpse of his nervousness oddly reassuring. "That night-there were Du'sien demons, dressed like police officers. We had to get past them. Eddie was too weak to run, and there wasn't time to hide-he would have died. So I used my stele- put *amendelin* rune on the inside of his arm. I thought-

"Are you *crazy*?" Bill shouted, but Richie ignored him.

Keene was as mad as Bill was, he slammed his hand down on top of the desk so hard that Eddie thought the wood might crack. "You know what the Law says about placing Marks on mundanes! You-you of all people ought to know better!"

"But it worked," said Richie. "Eds, show them your arm."

"Don't call me that," he said as he held out his bare arm. He remembered looking down at it that night in the alley, thinking how vulnerable it seemed. Now, just below the crease of his wrist, Eddie could see three faint overlapping circles, the lines as faint as the memory of a scar that had faded with the passage of years.

"See, it's almost gone," Richie said. "It didn't hurt him at all."

"That's not the point." Keene could barely control his anger. "You could have turned him into a *Forsaken*."

"But it *didn't*, it explains why he could see us. He must have Clave blood."

Eddie was confused. "But I don't-"

"Oh, *shut up*," Bill said with an acid tone in his voice.

"That's enough," said Keene, the displeasure clear in his voice. "Richie, there's no need to frighten him further."

"But I was right, wasn't I? It explains what happened to his mother, too. If she was a Shadowhunter in exile, she might well have Downworld enemies." Richie was protesting.

"My mother wasn't a Shadowhunter!"

"Your father, then," Richie said. "What about him?"

Eddie returned his gaze with a flat stare. "He died. Before I was born."

Richie flinched, almost imperceptibly. It was Bill who spoke. "It's possible," he said uncertainly. "If his father were a Sh-shadowhunter, and his mother a m-mundane—well, we all know it's against the Law to marry a mundie. M-maybe they were in hiding."

"My mother would have told me," Eddie said, although he thought of the lack of more than one photo of his father, the way his mother never spoke of him, and knew that it wasn't true.

"Not necessarily," said Richie. "We all have secrets."

"Jim," Eddie said. "Our friend. He would know." With the thought of Jim came a flash of guilt and horror. "It's been three days—he must be frantic. Can I call him? Is there a phone?" He turned to Richie "Please."

Richie hesitated, looking at Keene, who nodded and moved aside from the desk. Behind him was a globe, made of beaten brass, that didn't look quite like other globes Eddie had seen; there was something subtly strange about the shape of the countries and continents. Next to the globe was an old-fashioned black telephone with a silver rotary dial. Eddie lifted it to his ear, the familiar dial tone washing over him like soothing water.

Jim picked up on the third ring, "Hello?"

"Jim!" He sagged against the desk. "It's me. It's Eddie."

"Eddie." He could hear the relief in Jim's voice, along with something else he couldn't quite identify. "You're all right?"

"I'm fine," Eddie said. "I'm sorry I didn't call you before. Jim, my mom—"

"I know. The police were here."

"Then you haven't heard from her." Any vestigial hope that his mother had fled the house and hidden somewhere disappeared. There was no way she wouldn't have contacted Jim. "What did the police say?"

"Just that she was missing." Eddie thought of the policewoman with her skeletal hand, and shivered. "Where are you?"

"I'm in the city," Eddie said. "I don't know where exactly. With some friends. My wallet's gone, though. If you've got some cash, I could take a cab to your place—"

"No," Jim said shortly.

The phone slipped in his sweaty hand. He caught it. "What?"

"No," he said. "It's too dangerous. You can't come here."

“We could call—”

“Look.” Jim's voice was hard. “Whatever your mother's gotten herself mixed up in, it's nothing to do with me. You're better off where you are.”

“But I don't want to stay here.” Eddie heard the whine in his voice, like a child's. “I don't know these people. You—”

“I'm not your father, Eddie. I've told you that before.”

Tears burned the backs of his eyes. “I'm sorry. It's just—”

“Don't call me for favors again,” Jim said. “I've got my own problems; I don't need to be bothered with yours,” he added, and hung up the phone.

5. Shadowhunters

Notes for the Chapter:

I still need a life lmao ;D
Do you guys like the fast updates??? Or should I slow down a little?? It's just that I have a lot of free time...
Anyway, enjoy!!!!

Richie was leaning against the armrest of Bill's chair, watching Eddie. "I take it he wasn't happy to hear from you?"

Eddie's heart felt as if it had shrunk down to the size of a walnut: a tiny, hard stone in his chest. *I will not cry*, he thought. *Not in front of these people.*

"I think I'd like to have a talk with Eddie," said Keene. "Alone," he added firmly, seeing Richie's expression.

Bill stood up. "*Gladly.* We'll l-leave you to it."

"That's hardly fair," Richie objected. "I'm the one who found him, I'm the one who saved his life! You want me here, don't you?" he appealed, turning to Eddie.

No, he thought. *You got me into this mess, I do not want you to be here.*

Eddie looked away, knowing that if he opened his mouth, he'd start to cry. As if from a distance, he heard Bill laugh.

"Not everyone wants you all the t-time, Richie," Bill said.

"Don't be ridiculous," Eddie heard Richie say, but he sounded disappointed. "Fine, then. We'll be in the weapons room."

Keene loomed up in front of Eddie, a fussing gray blur. "Sit down," he said. "Here, on the couch."

Eddie sat gratefully onto the soft cushions. His cheeks were wet. He reached up to brush the tears away, blinking. "I don't cry much usually," he found himself saying. "It doesn't mean anything. I'll be

all right in a minute.”

"Everyone needs to cry in their lives," Keene said. "It's part of what makes you human."

I don't even know if I'm human anymore, Eddie thought.

Keene pulled the chair out from behind the desk, dragging it over so that he could sit facing Eddie. His eyes, Eddie saw, were gray, like his hair and tweed coat, but there was kindness in them. "Is there anything I could get for you?" he asked. "Something to drink? Some tea?"

"I don't want tea," Eddie was frowning. "I want to find my mother."

"Unfortunately, we don't know where she is" Keene said, rummaging in his pocket. He produced a handkerchief—crisply folded—and handed it to Eddie. He took it with silent astonishment. He'd never before known anyone who carried a handkerchief. "The demon you saw in your apartment—was that the first such creature you'd ever seen? You had no inkling such creatures existed before?"

Eddie shook his head, then paused. "One before, but I didn't realize what it was. The first time I saw Richie—"

"Right, of course, how foolish of me to forget." Keene nodded "In Pandemonium. That was the first time?"

"Yes."

"And your mother never mentioned them to you—nothing about another world, perhaps, that most people cannot see? Did she seem particularly interested in myths, fairy tales, legends of the fantastic —"

"No. She hated all that stuff. She even hated Disney movies. She didn't like me reading manga. She said it was childish."

Keene scratched his head. His hair didn't move. "Most peculiar," he murmured.

"Not really," said Eddie. "My mother wasn't peculiar. She was the

most normal person in the world.”

"Normal people don't generally find their homes ransacked by demons," Keene said, not unkindly.

"Maybe it was a mistake?"

"If it had been a mistake," KeeneKeene, "and you were an ordinary boy you would not have seen the demon that attacked you—or if you had, your mind would have processed it as something else entirely: a vicious dog, even another human being. That you could see it, that it spoke to you—"

"How did you know it spoke to me?"

"Richie reported that you said 'it talked.'"

"It hissed." Eddie shivered, remembering. "It talked about wanting to eat me, but I think it wasn't supposed to."

"Ravens are generally under the control of a stronger demon. They're not very bright or capable on their own," explained Keene. "The last time we saw one of those, Pennywise was—"

"Pennywise!" Eddie remembered something "I heard the same name in Pandemonium from the boy—I mean, the demon—"

"It's a name we all know," Keene said shortly. His voice was steady, but Eddie could see a slight tremble in his hands. Gard, back on his shoulder, ruffed his feathers uneasily.

"A demon?"

"No. Bob Gray, also known as Pennywise, is—*was*—a Shadowhunter."

"A Shadowhunter? Why do you say *was*?"

"Because he's dead," said Keene flatly. "He's been dead for fifteen years."

Eddie sank back against the couch cushions. His head was throbbing. Maybe he should have gone for that tea after all. "Could it be

someone else? Someone with the same nickname?"

"No one uses that nickname, Bob used it for irony. A clown's name, a sign that everything he did was *serious*." Keene was touching his chin. "But it could have been someone using his name to send a message." He stood up and paced to his desk, hands locked behind his back. "And this would be the time to do it."

"Why now?"

"Because of the Accords."

"What are those?" Eddie stared at Keene with genuine curiosity.

"Peace negotiations, with Downworlders." Keene stared at Eddie like he was a three year old student, and he was the intelligent teacher. "Downworlders are those who share the Shadow World with us. We have always lived in an uneasy peace with them."

"Like vampires, werewolves..."

"The Fair Folk," Keene said. "And Lilith's children, being half-demon, are warlocks."

"So what *are* you Shadowhunters?"

"We are sometimes called the Nephilim," said Keene. "In the Bible they were the offspring of humans and angels. The legend of the origin of Shadowhunters is that they were created more than a thousand years ago, when humans were being overrun by demon invasions from other worlds. A warlock summoned the Angel Raziel, who mixed some of his own blood with the blood of men in a cup, and gave it to those men to drink. Those who drank the Angel's blood became Shadowhunters, as did their children and their children's children. The cup thereafter was known as the Mortal Cup. Though the legend may not be fact, what is true is that through the years, when Shadowhunter ranks were depleted, it was always possible to create more Shadowhunters using the Cup."

This was *a lot* of information, Eddie didn't know if he processed everything.

"Was always possible?"

"The Cup is gone," said Keene. "Destroyed by Bob, just before he died. He set a great fire and burned himself to death along with his family, his wife, and his child. Scorched the land black. No one will build there still. They say the land is cursed."

"Is it?"

"Possibly. The Clave hands down curses on occasion as punishment for breaking the Law. Pennywise broke the greatest Law of all—he took up arms against his fellow Shadowhunters and slew them. He and his group, the Circle, killed dozens of their brethren along with hundreds of Downworlders during the last Accords. They were only barely defeated."

"Why would he want to turn on other Shadowhunters?"

"He didn't approve of the Accords. He despised Downworlders and felt that they should be slaughtered, wholesale, to keep this world pure for human beings. Though the Downworlders are not demons, not invaders, he felt they were demonic in nature, and that that was enough."

"Did the Accords get signed?"

"Yes, they were signed. When the Downworlders saw the Clave turn on Pennywise and his Circle in their defense, they realized Shadowhunters were not their enemies. Ironically, with his insurrection, Pennywise made the Accords possible." Keene sat down in the chair again. "I apologize; this must be a dull history lesson for you. That was Pennywise. A firebrand, a visionary, a man of great personal charm and conviction. And a killer. Now someone is invoking his name ..."

"But who?" Eddie asked. "And what does my mother have to do with it?"

Keene stood up again. "I don't know. But I shall do what I can to find out. I will send messages to the Clave and also to the Silent Brothers. They may wish to speak with you."

Eddie didn't ask who the Silent Brothers were. He was tired of asking questions whose answers only made him more confused. He stood up. "Is there any chance I could go home?"

Keene looked concerned. "No, I—I wouldn't think that would be wise."

"There are things I need there, even if I'm going to stay here. Clothes —"

"We can give you money to purchase new clothes."

"Please," Eddie said. "I have to see if—I have to see what's left."

Keene hesitated, then offered a short, inverted nod. "If Richie agrees to it, you may both go." He turned to the desk, rummaging among the papers. He glanced over his shoulder as if realizing Eddie was still there. "He's in the weapons room."

"I don't know where that is."

Keene smiled crookedly. "Mews will take you."

Eddie glanced toward the door where the fat orange cat was curled up like a small ottoman. He rose as Eddie came forward, fur rippling like liquid. With an imperious meow, Mews led him into the hall. When he looked back over his shoulder, he saw Keene already scribbling on a piece of paper. Sending a message to the mysterious Clave, Eddie guessed. They didn't sound like very nice people. He wondered what their response would be.

The weapon's room looked exactly the way something called "the weapons room" would look. Brushed metal walls were hung with every manner of sword, dagger, spike, pike, feather staff, bayonet, whip, mace, hook, and bow. Soft leather bags filled with arrows dangled from hooks, and there were stacks of boots, leg guards, and gauntlets for wrists and arms. The place smelled of metal and leather and steel polish. Bill and Richie, no longer barefoot, sat at a long table in the center of the room, their heads bent over an object between them. Richie looked up as the door shut behind Eddie

"Where's Keene?" he said.

"Writing to the Silent Brothers."

Bill repressed a shudder. "Ugh."

Eddie approached the table slowly, conscious of Bill's gaze. "What are you doing?"

"Putting the last touches on these." Richie moved aside so Eddie could see what lay on the table: three long slim wands of a dully glowing silver. They did not look sharp or particularly dangerous. "Sanvi, Sansanvi, and Semangelaf. They're seraph blades."

"Wow." Eddie said. "Are they magical?"

He could hear Bill chuckling. "Magic is a dark and elemental f-force, not just a lot of sparkly wands and c-crystal balls and talking goldfish."

Eddie turned around to look at him. "I never said—"

"Look, we don't do magic, okay?" Was all Richie said.

"Keene said I can go home." Eddie turned to Richie.

Richie nearly dropped the seraph blade he was holding. "He said *what?*"

"To look through my mother's things," he amended. "If you go with me." He preferred going with Richie than going with Bill. "If you really want to prove that my mom or dad was a Shadowhunter, we should look through my mom's things."

Richie was smiling now, "That's the first good idea you gave since I met you. Let's go."

Richie left the room, Eddie was about to do the same but he heard a voice behind him.

"E-Eddie" It was Bill, Eddie turned around slowly looking at him. Bill's angry face was gone, now he looked like a lost puppy in a rainy

night. "C-Can I talk to you?"

Eddie was about to say: *No, you've been rude to me.* But he realized he had been rude to Bill too. "Sure. What's up?"

Bill's face was starting to blush, a clear sign he was nervous. "I wanted t-to apologize for my behavior."

Eddie nodded slowly. "Okay-"

"It's just..." Bill interrupted, "I wasn't comfortable with a *mundane* here, y-you know? I'm sure the first time you talked to Richie you snapped at him too." He was giving him a little smile, almost non-existent.

Eddie sighed. "Well, *yeah*. He was being a creep."

"He is, sometimes." Bill was chuckling now.

Eddie was too. "I'm sorry I called you and Ben 'spoiled-rotten rich brats'"

"I guess I deserved it." Bill was looking at his feet, Eddie saw the same vulnerability in his face Bill had that night in Pandemonium, when Richie snapped at him.

"You didn't, I was being childish."

"Maybe we can start over?" Bill said raising his hand. "I'm William Denbrough, everyone calls me Bill"

Eddie smiled. "Edward Kaspbrak. Call me Eddie, my friends call me that way." He shook Bill's hand, it was warm now, like the kind of summer everyone liked.

Eddie felt something in his chest, the same feeling he had when he met Stan and Beverly. He didn't want that feeling to go away.

"Is this the part where you guys kiss?" Richie was in the doorway watching the two of them. Bill was blushing and Eddie rolling his eyes, laughing. "If we go right now, we should have another three, four hours of daylight."

"Do you want me to come with you?" Bill asked, as Eddie and Richie moved toward the door. Eddie glanced back at him. He was half-out of the chair, eyes expectant.

"No." Richie didn't turn around. "That's all right. Eds and I can handle this on our own."

"Don't call me *that*." But Richie ignored him.

Bill just nodded, dissapointed, and closed the door after them.

Richie led the way down the hall, Eddie half-jogging to keep up with Richie's long-legged stride. "Have you got your house keys?"

Eddie glanced down at his shoes. "Yeah."

"Good. Not that we couldn't break in, but we'd run a greater chance of disturbing any wards that might be up if we did."

"If you say so." The hall widened out into a marble-floored foyer, a black metal gate set into one wall. It was only when Richie pushed a button next to the gate and it lit up that he realized it was an elevator. It creaked and groaned as it rose to meet them. "Richie?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think I'm a Shadowhunter?"

Richie stared at him, thinking. "There's a strong possibility."

Eddie nodded, "So, if I am, I'm gonna *live* in the Institute?"

Richie chuckled, "Unless a demon kills you."

Richie spent the train ride to Brooklyn in complete silence. Farther down the train, two teenage girls sitting on an orange bench seat were giggling together, sporting pink jelly mules and fake tans. Eddie wondered for a moment if they were laughing at him, before he realized with a start of surprise that they were looking at Richie.

Eddie stuck close to him to study him a little. He had a few freckles on his face, his eyelashes were long, his hair was messy like always. When he saw Bill for the first time, Eddie thought immediately he was cute, but now he was seeing Richie. Richie *was* cute. More than Bill. In daylight, Richie's eyes were the color of golden syrup and were...looking right at him. He cocked an eyebrow. "Can I help you with something?"

Eddie could feel his face burning in embarrassment. "T-Those girls on the other side of the car are staring at you."

Richie assumed an air of mellow gratification. "Of course they are," he said. "I am stunningly attractive."

Eddie sighed. "Haven't you ever heard that modesty is an attractive trait?"

"Only from ugly people." Richie confided, he winked at the girls, who giggled and hid behind their hair.

Eddie only shook his head to himself. "How can they see you?"

"They have these things called *eyes*. Have you heard of those?"

"You know what I mean."

"Glamours are a pain to use. Sometimes we don't bother."

When they left the station and headed up the hill to Eddie's apartment, he took one of the seraph blades out of his pocket and started flipping it back and forth between his fingers and across his knuckles, humming to himself.

"We should've brought Bill with us." Eddie said.

He stopped humming. "He's really full of himself."

"And you *aren't*?" Eddie asked in irony.

"Bill is the kind of person that you don't bring to these kind of stuff, he would've bore you to death with his stories."

"He reminds me of a friend." Eddie said immediatly thinking of Stan.

"The one with brown hair and poor fashion sense?"

"Yep, that one." Eddie missed him, he missed Beverly as well. "I should go see them."

"No." Richie said. "It's too dangerous now. They probably forgot you already."

"They're not like that." Eddie rolled his eyes, "What was it Bill called you? Para-something?"

"Parabatai," said Richie. "It means a pair of warriors who fight together-who are closer than brothers. Bill is more than just my best friend. My father and his father were *parabatai* when they were young. His father was my godfather-that's why I live with them. They adopted me along with Ben."

"But your last name isn't Denbrough."

"No," Richie said, and Eddie would have asked what it was, but they had arrived at his house, and his heart had started to thump so loudly that he was sure it must be audible for miles. There was a humming in his ears, and the palms of his hands were damp with sweat. He stopped in front of the box hedges, and raised his eyes slowly, expecting to see yellow police tape cordoning off the front door, smashed glass littering the lawn, the whole thing reduced to rubble.

But there were no signs of destruction. Bathed in pleasant afternoon light, the brownstone seemed to glow. Bees droned lazily around the rosebushes under Madame Dorothea's windows. "It looks the same," Eddie said.

"On the outside." Richie reached into his jeans pocket and drew out another one of the metal and plastic contraptions Eddie had mistaken for a cell phone.

"So that's a Sensor? What does it do?" Eddie asked.

"It picks up frequencies, like a radio does, but these frequencies are demonic in origin."

"Demon shortwave?"

"Something like that." Richie held the Sensor out in front of him as he approached the house. It clicked faintly as they climbed the stairs, then stopped. Richie frowned. "It's picking up trace activity, but that could just be left over from that night. I'm not getting anything strong enough for there to be demons present now."

Eddie let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Good." He bent to retrieve his keys.

When he straightened up, he saw the scratches on the front door. It must have been too dark for him to have seen them last time. They looked like claw marks, long and parallel, raked deeply into the wood.

Richie touched his arm. "I'll go in first," he said. Eddie wanted to tell him that he didn't need to hide behind him, but the words wouldn't come. Eddie could taste the terror he'd felt when he'd first seen the Ravener. The taste was sharp and coppery on his tongue like old pennies.

The light in the hallway was out, but Eddie didn't need much light to navigate inside his own house. It was still destroyed as that day. With Richie just behind him, he found the door to his bedroom and reached for the knob. It was cold in his hand-so cold it nearly hurt, like touching an icicle with your bare skin. He saw Richie look at him quickly, but he was already turning the knob, or trying to. It moved slowly, almost stickily, as if the other side of it were embedded in something glutinous and syrupy

The door blew outward, knocking him off his feet. He skidded across the hallway floor and slammed into the wall, rolling onto his stomach. There was a dull roaring in his ears as he pulled himself up to his knees.

Richie, flat against the wall, was fumbling in his pocket, his face a mask of surprise. Looming over him like a giant in a fairy tale was an enormous man, big around as an oak tree, a broad-bladed axe clutched in one gigantic dead-white hand. Tattered filthy rags hung off his grimy skin, and his hair was a single matted tangle, thick with

dirt. He stank of poisonous sweat and rotting flesh. Eddie was glad he couldn't see his face-the back of him was bad enough.

Richie had the seraph blade in his hand. He raised it, calling out: "Sansanvi!"

A blade shot from the tube. Eddie thought of old movies where bayonets were hidden inside walking sticks, released at the flick of a switch. But he'd never seen a blade like this before: clear as glass, with a glowing hilt, wickedly sharp and nearly as long as Richie's forearm. He struck out, slashing at the gigantic man, who staggered back with a bellow.

Richie whirled around, racing towards Eddie. He caught his arm, hauling Eddie to his feet, pushing Eddie ahead of him down the hall. He could hear the thing behind them, following; its footsteps sounded like lead weights being dropped onto the floor, but it was coming on fast.

They sped through the entryway and out onto the landing, Richie whipping around to slam the front door shut.

Another blow came, and this time the hinges gave way and the door flew outward. The thing, lurched at Richie with his enormous fists raised. Richie brought the seraph blade around in an arcing sweep, burying it to the hilt in the giant's shoulder. For a moment the giant stood swaying. Then he lurched forward, his hands outstretched and grasping. Richie stepped aside hastily, but not hastily enough: The enormous fists caught hold of him as the giant staggered and fell, dragging Richie in his wake. Richie cried out once; there was a series of heavy and cracking thumps, and then silence.

Eddie scrambled to his feet and raced downstairs. Richie lay sprawled at the foot of the steps, his arm bent beneath him at an unnatural angle. Across his legs lay the giant, the hilt of Richie's blade protruding from his shoulder. He was not quite dead, but flopping weakly, a bloody froth leaking from his mouth. Eddie could see his face now-it was dead-white and papery, latticed with a black network of horrible scars that almost obliterated his features. His eye sockets were red suppurating pits. Fighting the urge to gag, Eddie stumbled down the last few stairs, stepped over the twitching giant, and knelt

down next to Richie.

"Are... are you okay?" Eddie laid a hand on Richie's shoulder

Richie opened his eyes. "Is it dead?"

"Almost."

"Hell." He winced. "My legs-"

"Hold still." Crawling around to his head, Eddie slipped his hands under Richie's arms and pulled. Richie grunted with pain as his legs slipped out from under the creature's spasming carcass. Eddie let go, and he struggled to his feet, his left arm across his chest.

Eddie stood up. "Is your arm all right?"

"No. Broken," he said. "Can you reach into my pocket?"

Eddie hesitated, nodded. "Which one?"

"Inside jacket, right side. Take out one of the seraph blades and hand it to me." He held still as Eddie nervously slipped his fingers into his pocket. He was standing so close that he could smell the scent of Richie, sweat and soap and blood. His breath tickled the back of Eddie's neck. His fingers closed on a tube and he drew it out, not looking at Richie.

"Thanks," Richie said. His fingers traced it briefly before he named it: "Sanvi." Like its predecessor, the tube grew into a wicked-looking dagger, its glow illuminating his face. "Don't watch," Richie said, going to stand over the scarred thing's body. He raised the blade over his head and brought it down. Blood fountained from the giant's throat, splattering Richie's boots.

Eddie half-expected the giant to vanish, folding in on itself the way the kid in Pandemonium had. But it didn't. The air was full of the smell of blood: heavy and metallic. Richie made a sound low in his throat. He was white-faced, whether with pain or disgust, Eddie couldn't tell. "I told you not to watch," he said.

"I-I thought it would disappear," Eddie said. "Back to its own

dimension-you said."

"I said that's what happens to demons when they die." Wincing, Richie shrugged his jacket off his shoulder, baring the upper part of his left arm. "That wasn't a demon." With his right hand he drew something out of his belt. It was the smooth wand-shaped object he'd used to carve those overlapping circles into Eddie's skin. Looking at it, Eddie felt his forearm begin to burn.

Richie saw Eddie staring and grinned the ghost of a grin. "This," he said, "is a stele." He touched it to an inked mark just below his shoulder, a curious shape almost like a star. Two arms of the star jutted out from the rest of the mark, unconnected. "And this," he said, "is what happens when Shadowhunters are wounded."

With the tip of the stele, Richie traced a line connecting the two arms of the star. When he lowered his hand, the mark was shining as if it had been etched with phosphorescent ink. As Eddie watched, it sank into his skin, like a weighted object sinking into water. It left behind a ghostly reminder: a pale, thin scar, almost invisible.

An image rose in Eddie's mind. His mother's back, not quite covered by her bathing suit top, the blades of her shoulders and curves of her spine dappled with narrow, white marks. It was like something Eddie had seen in a dream-his mother's back didn't really look like that, he knew. But the image nagged at him.

Richie let out a sigh, the tense look of pain leaving his face. He moved the arm, slowly at first, then more easily, lifting it up and down, clenching his fist. Clearly it was no longer broken.

"That's amazing," Eddie said. "How did you-?"

"That was an *iratze* -a healing rune," Richie said. "Finishing the rune with the stele activates it." He shoved the slim wand into his belt and shrugged his jacket back on. With the toe of his boot he prodded the giant's corpse. "We're going to have to report this to Keene," he said. "He'll freak out," he added, as if the thought of Keene's alarm gave him some satisfaction. Richie, Eddie thought, was the sort of person who liked it when things were happening, even things that were bad.

"Why will he freak?" Eddie asked.

Richie looked at the thing. "You see the scars all over its face?"

"Yes."

"Those were made with a stele. Like this one." Richie tapped the wand in his belt. "You asked me what happens when you carve Marks onto someone who doesn't have Shadowhunter blood. Just one Mark will only burn you, but a lot of Marks, powerful ones? Carved into the flesh of a totally ordinary human being with no trace of Shadowhunter ancestry? You get this." He jerked his chin at the corpse. "The runes are agonizingly painful. The Marked ones go insane-the pain drives them out of their minds. They become fierce, mindless killers. They don't sleep or eat unless you make them, and they die, usually quickly. Runes have great power and can be used to do great good-but they can be used for evil. The Forsaken are evil."

Eddie was confused and horrorized at the same time. "But why would anyone do that to themselves?"

"Nobody would. It's something that gets done to them. By a warlock, maybe, some Downworlder gone bad. The Forsaken are loyal to the one who Marked them, and they're fierce killers. They can obey simple commands, too. It's like having a-a slave army." Richie stepped over the dead Forsaken, and glanced over his shoulder at Eddie. "I'm going back upstairs."

"But there's nothing there."

"There might be more of them," Richie said, almost as if he were hoping there would be. "You should wait here." Richie started up the steps.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said a shrill and familiar voice. "There are more of them where the first one came from."

Richie, who was nearly at the top of the stairs, spun and stared. So did Eddie, although he knew immediately who had spoken. That gravelly accent was unmistakable.

"Madame Dorothea?"

The old woman inclined her head regally. She stood in the doorway of her apartment, dressed in what looked like a tent made of raw purple silk. Gold chains glittered on her wrists and roped her throat. Her long badger-striped hair straggled from the bun pinned to the top of her head.

Richie was still staring. "But..."

"More what?" Eddie said.

"More Forsaken," replied Dorothea with a cheerfulness that, Eddie felt, didn't really fit the circumstances. She glanced around the entryway. "You have made a mess, haven't you? I'm sure you weren't planning on cleaning up either. Typical."

"But you're a mundane," Richie said, finally finishing his sentence.

"So observant," said Dorothea, her eyes gleaming. "The Clave really broke the mold with you."

Richie was as confused as Eddie was, and that was an understatement. "You know about the Clave?" Richie demanded. "You knew about them, and you knew there were Forsaken in this house, and you didn't notify them? Just the existence of Forsaken is a crime against the Covenant-"

"Neither Clave nor Covenant have ever done anything for me," said Madame Dorothea, her eyes flashing angrily. "I owe them nothing." For a moment her gravelly New York accent vanished, replaced with something else, a thicker, deeper accent that Eddie didn't recognize.

"Richie, stop it," Eddie said. He turned to Madame Dorothea. "If you know about the Clave and the Forsaken," he said, "then maybe you know what happened to my mother?"

Dorothea shook her head, her earrings swinging. There was something like pity on her face. "My advice to you," she said, "is to forget about your mother. She's gone."

It felt like someone had punched Eddie in the face, "You mean she's..."

"No." Dorothea spoke the word almost reluctantly. "I'm sure she's still alive. For now."

"Then I have to find her," Eddie said. Nobody was punching him in the face now; Richie was standing behind Eddie, his hand on Eddie's elbow as if to brace him, but Eddie barely noticed. "You understand? I have to find her before-"

Madame Dorothea held up a hand. "I don't want to involve myself in Shadowhunter business."

"But you knew my mother. She was your neighbor-"

"This is an official Clave investigation." Richie cut him off. "I can always come back with the Silent Brothers."

"Oh, for the-" Dorothea glanced at her door, then at Richie and Eddie. "I suppose you might as well come in," she said, finally. "I'll tell you what I can." She started toward the door, then halted on the threshold, glaring. "But if you tell anyone I helped you, Shadowhunter, you'll wake up tomorrow with snakes for hair and an extra pair of arms."

"That might be nice, an extra pair of arms," Richie said. "Handy in a fight."

"Not if they're growing out of your..." Dorothea paused and looked Eddie, then at Richie, not without malice. "Neck."

"Yikes," said Richie mildly.

"Yikes is right, Richard Tozier." Dorothea marched into the apartment, her purple tent flying around her like a gaudy flag.

Eddie opened his mouth in surprise and stared at Richie. "*Richard Tozier?*"

"It's my name." Richie looked shaken. "I can't say I like that she knows it."

Eddie glanced after Dorothea. The lights were on inside the apartment; already the heavy smell of incense was flooding the

entryway, mixing unpleasantly with the stench of blood. "Still, I think we might as well try talking to her. What could go wrong?"

"Oh, Eds." Richie said. "*You have no idea.*"

6. Revelations

Notes for the Chapter:

Who am I kidding, I don't have a life, I'm gonna post
non-stop xD
Enjoy!!

The entryway of Dorothea's house, reeking of incense, was hung with bead curtains and astrological posters. One showed the constellations of the zodiac, another a guide to Chinese magical symbols, and another showed a hand with fingers spread, each line on the palm carefully labeled. Above the hand Latinate script spelled out the words *In Manibus Fortuna*. Narrow shelves holding stacked books ran along the wall beside the door.

One of the bead curtains rattled, and Madame Dorothea poked her head through. "Interested in chiromancy?" she said, noting Eddie's gaze. "Or just nosy?"

"Neither," Eddie said. "Can you really tell fortunes?"

"My mother had a great talent. She could see a man's future in his hand or the leaves at the bottom of his teacup. She taught me some of her tricks." She transferred her gaze to Richie "Speaking of tea, young man, would you like some?"

"What?" Richie asked, confused.

"Tea. I find it both settles the stomach and concentrates the mind. Wonderful drink, tea."

"I'll have tea." Eddie said, realizing how long it had been since he had eaten or drunk anything. He felt as if he'd been running on pure adrenaline since he woke up.

Richie succumbed. "All right. As long as it isn't Earl Grey," he added, wrinkling his fine-boned nose. "I hate bergamot."

Madame Dorothea disappeared back through the bead curtain, leaving it swaying gently behind her.

Eddie stared at Richie. "You may be the only guy my age, apart from me, who knows what bergamot is, much less that it's in Earl Grey tea."

"Yes, well," Richie said, with a supercilious look, "I'm not like other guys. Besides," he added, flipping a book off the shelf, "at the Institute we have to take classes in basic medicinal uses for plants. It's required."

"I figured all your classes were stuff like Slaughter 101 and Beheading for Beginners." Eddie said, giggling.

Richie flipped a page. "Very funny, Kaspbrak."

Eddie, who had been studying the palmistry poster, whirled on him. "Don't call me that."

Richie glanced up, surprised. "Why not? It's your last name, isn't it?"

The image of Stan and Beverly rose up behind Eddie's eyes. The last time he had seen them, they were staring after Eddie as he ran out of Java Jones. Eddie turned back to the poster, blinking. "No reason."

Eddie heard him drop the book back onto the shelf. "This must be the trash she keeps up front to impress credible mundanes," Richie, sounding disgusted. "There's not one serious text here."

"Just because it's not the magic that you use—"

"By the Angel, Eddie. I do *not* use magic. Get it through your small head."

Eddie blinked, he didn't know if Richie had called him dumb, or if literally he had a small head. "I saw you use magic—"

"I use *tools* that are magical. And just to be able to do that, I have to undergo rigorous training. The rune tattoos on my skin protect me too. If you tried to use one of the seraph blades, for instance, it'd probably burn your skin, maybe kill you."

"What if I was a Shadowhunter?" Eddie was slightly annoyed with Richie's behaviour. "If I was, could I use them then?"

"Look, forget it okay? Don't touch any of my blades."

"It's not like I'm gonna sell them on *Amazon*."

"Sell them on *what*?"

Eddie stared blankly at him, he was honestly shocked. "A place of mythical power."

Richie looked confused, then shrugged.

The bead curtain rattled again, and Madame Dorothea's head appeared. "Tea's on the table," she said. "There's no need for you two to keep standing there like donkeys. Come into the parlor."

"There's a parlor?" Eddie said.

"Of course there's a parlor," said Dorothea. "Where else would I entertain?"

The parlor was so dimly lit that it took several blinks for Eddie's eyes to adjust. Faint light outlined the black velvet curtains drawn across the entire left wall. Stuffed birds and bats dangled from the ceiling on thin cords, shiny dark beads where their eyes should have been.

The floor was layered with frayed Persian rugs that spit up puffs of dust underfoot. A group of overstuffed pink armchairs were gathered around a low table: A stack of tarot cards bound with a silk ribbon occupied one end of the table, a crystal ball on a gold stand the other. In the middle of the table was a silver tea service, laid out for company: a neat plate of stacked sandwiches, a blue teapot unfurling a thin stream of white smoke, and two teacups on matching saucers set carefully in front of two of the armchairs.

"Wow," Eddie said weakly. "This looks great." He took a seat in one of the armchairs. It felt good to sit down.

Dorothea smiled, her eyes glinting with a sly humor. "Have some tea," she said, hefting the pot. "Milk? Sugar?"

"Sugar," Eddie replied.

Richie shrugged, took a sandwich, and set the plate down. Eddie watched him warily as he bit into it. He shrugged again. "Cucumber," he said, in response to Eddie's stare. "I hate cucumber." He handed the rest of the sandwich to Eddie. He bit into it—it was seasoned with just the right amount of mayonnaise and pepper. His stomach rumbled in grateful appreciation of the first food he'd tasted since the mini hamburgers he'd eaten with his friends.

"Is there anything else you hate that I should know about?" Eddie said to Richie.

Richie looked at Dorothea over the rim of his teacup.

"Liars," he said.

Calmly the old woman set her teapot down. "You can call me a liar all you like. It's true, I'm not a witch. But my mother was."

Richie looked surprised. "That's impossible."

"Why impossible?" Eddie asked curiously. He took a sip of the tea. It was bitter, strongly flavored with a peaty smokiness.

Richie expelled a breath. "Because they're half-human, half-demon. All witches and warlocks are crossbreeds. And because they're crossbreeds, they can't have children. They're sterile."

"Like mules," Eddie said thoughtfully, remembering something from biology class. "Mules are sterile crossbreeds."

"Wow, you deserve an award." Richie said rolling his eyes. "All Downworlders are in some part demon, but only warlocks are the children of demon parents. It's why their powers are the strongest."

"Vampires and werewolves—they're part demon too? And faeries?" Eddie asked.

"Vampires and werewolves are the result of diseases brought by demons from their home dimensions. Most demon diseases are deadly to humans, but in these cases they worked strange changes on the infected, without actually killing them. And faeries—" Richie was cut off by Dorothea.

"Faeries are fallen angels," said Dorothea, "cast down out of heaven for their pride."

"That's the legend," Richie said "It's also said that they're the offspring of demons and angels, which always seemed more likely to me. Good and evil, mixing together. Faeries are as beautiful as angels are supposed to be, but they have a lot of mischief and cruelty in them." He then looked at Eddie. "Bill suggested you could be one, but you don't have what it takes—"

Wow, Eddie thought, *Richie basically said I'm ugly*. He stared down at the empty plate, not wanting to see anyone at the eye.

But Richie touched Eddie's shoulder, as if he knew what Eddie was thinking. "Because you're not cruel." Richie said.

Eddie saw a light in Richie's eyes when he said that.

"Enough about fairies," said Dorothea, suddenly practical. "It's true that warlocks can't have children. My mother adopted me because she wanted to make sure there'd be someone to attend this place after she was gone. I don't have to master magic myself. I have only to watch and guard."

"Guard what?" Eddie asked, setting his empty teacup down with a clatter.

Instantly, Madame Dorothea pounced on the cup and stared into it intently, a line appearing between her penciled eyebrows.

"What?" Eddie said nervously. "Did I crack the cup or something?"

"She's reading your tea leaves," Richie said, sounding bored, but he leaned forward along with Eddie as Dorothea turned the cup around and around in her thick fingers, scowling.

"Is it bad?" Eddie asked.

"It is neither bad nor good. It is confusing." Dorothea looked at Richie. "Give me your cup," she commanded.

Richie looked affronted. "But I'm not done with my—"

The old woman snatched the cup out of his hand and splashed the excess tea back into the pot. Frowning, she gazed at what remained. "I see violence in your future, a great deal of blood shed by you and others. You'll fall in love with the wrong person. Also, you have two enemies."

"Only two? Well, that's good to know." Richie leaned back in his chair as Dorothea put down his cup and picked up Eddie's again. She shook her head.

"There is nothing for me to read here. The images are jumbled, meaningless." She glanced at Eddie. "Is there a block in your mind?"

Eddie was puzzled. "A what?"

"Like a spell that might conceal a memory, or might have blocked out your Sight."

Eddie shook his head. "No, of course not. Well...I don't know."

"Very well, let's try something else." Dorothea put the cup down, and reached for the silk-wrapped tarot cards. She fanned the cards and held them out to Eddie. "Slide your hand over these until you touch one that feels hot or cold, or seems to cling to your fingers. Then draw that one and show it to me."

Obediently, Eddie ran his fingers over the cards. They felt cool to the touch, and slippery, then suddenly, he felt one card glued to his hand. He held it up.

"The Ace of Cups," Dorothea said, sounding bemused. "The love card."

Eddie turned it over and looked at it. The card was heavy in his hand, the image on the front thick with real paint. It showed a hand holding up a cup in front of a rayed sun painted with gilt. The cup was made of gold, engraved with a pattern of smaller suns and studded with rubies. The style of the artwork was as familiar to him as his own breath. "This is a good card, right?"

"Not necessarily. The most terrible things men do, they do in the name of love," said Madame Dorothea, her eyes gleaming. "But it is a

powerful card. What does it mean to you?"

"That my mother painted it," said Eddie, and dropped the card onto the table. "She did, didn't she?"

Dorothea nodded, a look of pleased satisfaction on her face. "She painted the whole pack. A gift for me."

"So you say." Richie stood up, his eyes cold. "How well did you know Eddie's mother?"

Eddie craned his head to look up at him. "Richie, you don't have to —"

Dorothea sat back in her chair, the cards fanned out across her wide chest. "Sonia knew what I was, and I knew what she was. We didn't talk about it much. Sometimes she did favors for me—like painting this pack of cards—and in return I'd tell her the occasional piece of Downworld gossip. There was a name she asked me to keep an ear out for, and I did."

Richie's expression was unreadable. "What name was that?"

"Pennywise."

Eddie sat straight up in his chair. "But that's—"

"And when you say you knew what Sonia was, what do you mean? What was she?" Richie asked.

Dorothea said, "She was a—"

"Shadowhunter." Eddie finished the sentence.

Dorothea nodded.

"Shadowhunter she was, one of the Clave—"

"No," Eddie whispered.

Dorothea looked at Eddie with sad, almost kindly eyes. "It's true. She chose to live in this house precisely because—"

"Because this is a Sanctuary." Richie said to Dorothea. "Isn't it? Your mother was a Control. She made this space, hidden, protected—it's a perfect spot for Downworlders on the run to hide out. That's what you do, isn't it? You hide criminals here."

"You *would* call them that," Dorothea said. "You're familiar with the motto of the Covenant?"

"Sed lex dura lex," said Richie automatically. "The Law is hard, but it is the Law."

"Sometimes the Law is too hard. I know the Clave would have taken me away from my mother if they could. You want me to let them do the same to others?"

"So you're a philanthropist." Richie's lip curled. "I suppose you expect me to believe that Downworlders don't pay you handsomely for the privilege of your Sanctuary?"

Dorothea grinned, wide enough to show a flash of gold molars. "We can't all get by on our looks like you."

Richie looked unmoved by the flattery. "I should tell the Clave about you—"

"You can't!" Eddie was on his feet now. "You promised."

"I never promised anything." Richie looked mutinous. He strode to the wall and tore aside one of the velvet hangings. "You want to tell me what this is?" he demanded.

"It's a door, Richie," said Eddie. It *was* a door, set strangely in the wall between the two bay windows. Clearly it couldn't be a door that led anywhere, or it would have been visible from the outside of the house. It looked as if it were made of some softly glowing metal, more buttery than brass but as heavy as iron. The knob had been cast in the shape of an eye.

"Shut up," Richie said angrily. "It's a Portal. Isn't it?"

"It's a five-dimensional door," said Dorothea, laying the tarot cards back on the table. "Dimensions aren't all straight lines, you know,"

she added, in response to Eddie's blank look. "There are dips and folds and nooks and crannies all tucked away. It's a bit hard to explain when you've never studied dimensional theory, but, in essence, that door can take you anywhere in this dimension that you want to go. It's—"

"An escape plan," Richie said. "That's why your mother wanted to live here. So she could always flee at a moment's notice."

"Then why didn't she—" Eddie began, and broke off, suddenly horrified. "Because of me," he said. "She wouldn't leave without me that night. So she stayed."

Richie was shaking his head. "You can't blame yourself."

Feeling tears gather under his eyelids, Eddie pushed past Richie to the door. "I want to see where she would have gone," he said, reaching for the door. "I want to see where she was going to escape to—"

"Eddie, no!" Richie reached for him, but Eddie's fingers had already closed around the knob. It spun rapidly under his hand, the door flying open as if he'd pushed it. Dorothea lumbered to her feet with a cry, but it was too late. Before he could even finish his sentence, Eddie found himself flung forward and tumbling through empty space.

7. Fool Me Once

Notes for the Chapter:

Ok, I'm so f-ing excited about this story now lmao
I realized now that I never mentioned the characters' ages. Just Eddie's
Here we go:
Eddie - 15 (almost sixteen)
Stan - 16
Beverly - 16
Richie - 17
Ben -16 (almost seventeen)
Bill - 17
The main characters only, the parents are in their late thirties lol.
Enjoy!!!

The sensation of falling was the worst part; Eddie's heart flew up into his throat and his stomach turned to water. He flung his hands out, trying to catch at something, anything, that might slow his descent.

He thumped to the ground, hard, his hip and shoulder striking packed earth. He rolled over, sucking the air back into his lungs. He was just beginning to sit up when someone landed on top of him.

He was knocked backward. A forehead banged against his, his knees banging against someone else's. Tangled up in arms and legs, Eddie coughed hair—not his own—out of his mouth and tried to struggle out from under the weight that felt like it was crushing him flat.

"Ouch," Richie said in his ear, his tone indignant. "You elbowed me."

"You crushed me."

Richie levered himself up on his arms and looked down at him. Eddie could see blue sky above his head, a bit of tree branch, and the corner of a gray clapboard house. "Well, you didn't leave me much choice, did you?" Richie asked. "Not after you decided to leap merrily through that Portal like you were jumping the F train. You're

just lucky it didn't dump us out in the East River."

"You didn't have to come after me."

"Yes, I did," he said. "You're far too inexperienced to protect yourself in a hostile situation without me."

"That's sweet. Maybe I'll forgive you."

"Forgive me? For what?"

"For telling me to shut up."

His eyes narrowed. "I did not ... Well, I did, but you were—"

"Never mind." Eddie's arm, pinned under his own back, was beginning to cramp. Rolling to the side to free it, he saw the brown grass of a dead lawn, a chain-link fence, and more of the gray clapboard house, now distressingly familiar.

Eddie froze. "I know where we are."

Richie stopped spluttering. "What?"

"This is Jim's house." He sat up, pitching Richie to the side.

Richie rolled gracefully to his feet and held out a hand to help Eddie up. Eddie ignored him and scrambled upright, shaking out his numb arm.

They stood in front of a small gray row house, nestled among the other row houses that lined the Williamsburg waterfront. A breeze blew off the East River, setting a small sign swinging over the brick front steps. Eddie watched Richie as he read the block-lettered words aloud: "HOPPER BOOKS. FINE USED, NEW, AND OUT OF PRINT. CLOSED SATURDAYS."

He glanced at the dark front door, its knob wound with a heavy padlock. A few days' worth of mail lay on the doormat, untouched. He glanced at Eddie. "He lives in a bookstore?"

"Behind the store." Eddie said, still confused as to why he arrived

there. "How did we get here?"

"Through the Portal," Richie said, examining the padlock. "It takes you to whatever place you're thinking of."

"But I wasn't thinking of this place—"

"You must have been." He dropped the subject, seeming uninterested. "So, since we're here anyway ..."

"Yeah?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Leave, I guess," Eddie said bitterly. "Jim told me to never come here again."

Richie shook his head. "And you just accept that?"

Eddie hugged his arms around himself. Despite the fading heat of the day, he felt cold. "Do I have a choice?"

"We always have choices," Richie said. "If I were you, I'd be pretty curious about Jim right now. Do you have keys to the house?"

Eddie shook his head. "No, but sometimes he leaves the back door unlocked." He pointed to the narrow alley between Jim's row house and the next. Plastic trash cans were propped in a neat row beside stacks of folded newspapers and a plastic tub of empty soda bottles. At least Jim was still a responsible recycler.

"You sure he isn't home?" Richie asked.

He glanced at the empty curb. "Well, his truck's gone, the store's closed, and all the lights are off. I'd say probably not."

"Then lead the way."

The narrow aisle between the row houses ended in a high chain-link fence. It surrounded Jim's small back garden, where the only plants flourishing seemed to be the weeds that had sprung up through the paving stones, cracking them into powdery shards.

“Up and over,” Richie said, jamming the toe of a boot into a gap in the fence. He began to climb. The fence rattled so loudly that Eddie glanced around nervously, but there were no lights on in the neighbors’ house. Richie cleared the top of the fence and sprang down the other side, landing in the bushes to the accompaniment of an earsplitting yowl.

For a moment Eddie thought Richie must have landed on a stray cat. He heard Richie shout in surprise as he fell backward. A dark shadow—much too big to be feline—exploded out of the shrubbery and streaked across the yard, keeping low. Rolling to his feet, Richie darted after it, looking murderous.

Eddie started to climb. As he threw his leg over the top of the fence, Ben's jeans caught on a twist of wire and tore up the side. He dropped to the ground, shoes scuffing the soft dirt, he swore loudly, just as Richie cried out in triumph. “Got him!” Eddie turned to see Richie sitting on top of the prone intruder, whose arms were up over his head. Richie grabbed for his wrist. “Come on, let’s see your face —”

“Get the hell off me, you pretentious asshole,” the intruder snarled, shoving at Richie. He struggled halfway into a sitting position. It was a voice Eddie recognized immediately.

Eddie stopped dead in his tracks. “*Stan?*”

When Ben entered the weapon's room, he saw Bill sitting on the wooded chair, his face frowning.

"Bill," He called, Bill got out of his trance and stared at Ben. "Where's Richie and Eddie?"

"Oh, they're out. They were s-supposed to go to Eddie's house b-but it's been half an hour already."

"Okay." Ben simply said. "I made cupcakes, do you want some?"

Bill sighed. "I guess eating one cupcake won't k-kill me."

Ben giggled, "C'mon, before Mews finishes them."

They arrived at the kitchen, and Bill saw that Ben wasn't lying. There were three small cupcakes on the small wooden table. He picked one and took a bite.

It tasted like a combination of rotten strawberries, iron and vinegar. Bill shut his eyes and swallowed the damn *cupcake*.

"So, is it good? I saw the recipe in a website called *Facebook*."

Bill could feel himself turning green of disgust. He coughed loudly before saying, "It's ... P-peculiar."

"I was so worried they might come out bad, it's weird that Mews is not here, though. Usually Richie's cupcakes make him go crazy."

Yeah, I wonder why Mews is not here. Bill thought, his stomach was growling. Not from hunger.

"You sound like you're hungry, you want one more?" Ben handed him another cupcake.

"NO!" Bill was screaming, "I mean, no thank you. I'm...on a diet."

"Oh, yeah. I forgot." Ben hummed and was leaving the room, not before saying, "When Richie arrives, please tell him I need him to clean up my bedroom."

Bill grabbed the first trash can closer to him and everything started to come out of his stomach.

When he finished, he looked up and saw Mews in the doorway staring at him with superiority.

"L-lucky you, Mews." Bill said.

Mews just stared at Bill for a few seconds and then left the kitchen.

And for the first time in years, Bill felt completely alone.

Until his stomach growled again.

He was gonna need something bigger than a trash can.

"What were you doing hiding in Jim's's bushes, you idiot?" Eddie asked, brushing leaves out of Stan's hair. He suffered Eddie ministrations with glaring bad grace. Somehow when he'd pictured his reunion with Stan, when all this was over, he'd been in a better mood.

"All right, that's enough. I can fix my own hair, Eddie," Stan said, jerking away from his touch. They were sitting on the steps of Jim's back porch. Richie had propped himself on the porch railing and was assiduously pretending to ignore them, while using the stele to file the edges of his fingernails. Eddie wondered if the Clave would approve.

"I mean, did Jim know you were there?" Eddie asked.

"Of course he didn't know I was there," Stan said irritably. "I've never asked him, but I'm sure he has a fairly stringent policy about random teenagers lurking in his shrubbery."

"You're not random; he knows you." Eddie wanted to reach out and touch his cheek, still bleeding slightly where a branch had scratched it. "The main thing is that you're all right."

"That *I'm* all right?" Stan laughed, a sharp, unhappy sound. "Eddie, do you have any idea what we've been through this past couple of days? The last time Bev and I saw you, you were running out of Java Jones like a bat out of hell, and then you just ... disappeared. You never picked up your cell—then your house was destroyed—then Jim told me you were off staying with some relatives upstate when I know you don't have any other relatives. Bev is not even here, she's at her house probably cryingfor you."

Richie, still occupied with the stele, chuckled low under his breath.

"I didn't do it on purpose," Eddie said. "You're my best friends—"

"Are we?" Stan asked, faking surprise. "What could be so important that you wouldn't even tell us?"

"I was with Richie—"

"Yeah, well, you clearly also couldn't be bothered to call me or Bev and tell us you were shacking up with some wannabe goth you probably met at Pandemonium," Stan pointed out sourly. "After we spent the past three days wondering if you were *dead*."

"At least I don't dress like a forty year old man." Richie was mocking Stan. They ignored him.

"I wasn't *shacking up*." Eddie said, glad of the darkness as blood rushed to his face.

"So what have you been doing these past three days, then?" Stan said, his eyes dark with suspicion. "Do you really have a great-aunt Matilda who contracted avian flu and needed to be nursed back to health?"

"Did Jim actually say that?"

"No. He just said you had gone to visit a sick relative, and that your phone probably just didn't work out in the country. Not that I believed him. After he shooed me off his front porch, I went around the side of the house and looked in the back window. Watched him packing up a green duffel bag like he was going away for the weekend. That was when I decided to stick around and keep an eye on things."

"Why? Because he was packing a bag?"

"He was packing it full of weapons," Stan said, scrubbing at the blood on his cheek with the sleeve of his white shirt. "Knives, a couple daggers, even a sword. Funny thing is, some of the weapons looked like they were glowing." He looked from Eddie to Richie, and back again. His tone was edged as sharply as one of Jim's knives. "Now, are you going to say I was imagining it?"

"No," Eddie said. "I'm not going to say that." He glanced at Richie. The last light of sunset struck gold sparks from his eyes. He said, "I'm going to tell him the truth."

"I know."

“Are you going to try to stop me?”

Richie looked down at the stele in his hand. “My oath to the Covenant binds me,” he said. “No such oath binds you.”

Eddie turned back to Stan, taking a deep breath. “All right,” he said. “Here’s what you have to know.”

The sun had slipped entirely past the horizon, but Beverly couldn't care less, she had been staring at her phone for the last twenty minutes, waiting for Stan to give her updates. Stan had said he was going to Jim's house because he was acting suspicious.

"Come on, Uris." She whispered to herself.

After a few more minutes, she gave up and let out a sigh, falling into her messy bed.

Beverly's room wasn't what anyone could call 'feminine'. The walls were painted with a bright blue color, there were posters of creepypastas, slasher movies and all kinds of demonology, she began to like that stuff at the age of thirteen, it was out of nowhere. The interest in demons. Her parents said she needed to stop putting things like that in her room, because they were *boy stuff*. Beverly thought that was bullshit.

She hadn't cleaned her room since she found out Eddie was missing, she tried to call the police, but all they said was 'We're gonna *investigate*.'

Knock, knock.

That was weird, her parents didn't return from work at this hour.

She left her room and started going downstairs to open the door, and saw nothing. No one was there. She thought it was probably some kind of joke, she was about to close the door when something caught her attention.

It was a white envelope on the ground, the name *Beverly*

Marsh written with cursive letter.

She picked it up and opened it.

A necklace. A really pretty necklace with some kind of purple rock attached to it like a diamond. And a note.

She didn't recognize the handwriting, it said: *Use it, emergencies only.*

Suddenly, there was a noise back in the kitchen, she turned around slowly. The house was dark, darker than it was ever before, she hurried to turn on the lights but the switch button wasn't working. She tried again, nothing.

She heard something else, coming out of the kitchen. Bones cracking, like in those monster movies she used to watch at midnight with Stan, she gulped and started to walk slowly, a part of her told her to run, the other part told her to go see what was happening in her kitchen.

The necklace was still in her trembling hand.

When she arrived at the kitchen, she now wished she ran in the first place.

Beverly first thought it was a dog, a *really big* dog, but then she saw the eyes. Black, like the night, like carbon. With scales on its skin, large claws digging into the floor. Her first instinct was to scream, the creature looked at her and growled, showing sharp metal teeth. Beverly started to run, heading to the principal door, but the creature was *climbing* through the walls, starting to get closer to her.

The necklace was already on the floor, Beverly felt its claws grabbing her and pushing her to the ground, she bit her head. Hard.

Everything was blurry around her, she tried to scream for help but the words wouldn't come out.

The thing got closer to her, she could smell its terrible breath, like rotten meat and trash. She tried to hit the thing but her right hand was too weak.

She could sense a light beside her, she turned her head and saw the purple necklace glowing, it was closer to her left hand, she grabbed it and threw it at the thing's mouth while it was open. The thing swallowed it and fell backwards, it was like the thing was choking, Beverly sit straight up, watching the creature grabbing it's neck, then the thing was emitting a purple light, then exploded. And disappeared.

The necklace fell perfectly on the now clean carpet. Beverly looked around, the house was the same as before, the lights were on now. Any chance to prove that a demon existed was gone. She slowly grabbed the necklace and put it around her neck.

She didn't know what the hell happened.

It all felt like dream, a very realistic dream. But something inside her was telling her this wasn't just a dream.

And that it was far from over.

The porch was in darkness by the time Eddie stopped speaking. Stan had listened to his lengthy explanation with a nearly impassive expression, only wincing a little when he got to the part about the Ravener demon. When he was done speaking, Eddie cleared his dry throat, suddenly dying for a glass of water. "So," he said, "any questions?"

Stan held up his hand. "Oh, I've got questions. Several."

Eddie exhaled warily. "Okay, shoot."

He pointed at Richie. "Now, he's a—what do you call people like him again?"

"He's a Shadowhunter," Eddie said.

"A demon hunter," Richie clarified. "I kill demons. It's not that complicated, really."

Stan looked at Eddie again. "For real?" His eyes were narrowed, as if

he half-expected Eddie to tell him that none of it was true and Richie was actually a dangerous escaped lunatic he'd decided to befriend on humanitarian grounds.

"For real."

"There was an intent look on Stan's face. "And there are vampires, too? Werewolves, warlocks, all that stuff?"

Eddie gnawed his lower lip. "So I hear."

"And you kill them, too?" Stan asked, directing the question to Richie, who had put the stele back in his pocket and was examining his flawless nails for defects.

"Only when they've been naughty."

"What about, dragons, mermaids—"

"Dragons are extinct now. Mermaids are located mostly in the Indian Ocean." Richie said.

"And unicorns?"

"Don't be silly, nobody believes in unicorns."

For a moment Stan merely sat and stared down at his feet. Eddie wondered if burdening him with this kind of information had been the wrong thing to do. Stan had a stronger practical streak than almost anyone else Eddie knew; he might hate knowing something like this, something for which there was no logical explanation. Eddie leaned forward anxiously, just as Stan lifted his head. "This is so awesome, Beverly will love to hear about this," he said.

Richie frowned looking at Stan like he said he was pregnant. "No."

Stan rolled his eyes. "Come on! She's our best friend, she deserves to know about this—"

Eddie looked at Richie. "I can tell her too, right?"

"No," Richie was standing up. "Girls are indiscreet."

"First, that's sexist. Second, Beverly doesn't have anyone to tell." Stan said, his arms crossing.

Richie let out an exasperated sigh. "Mundane, you're getting on my nerves, I'll tell her then—"

"Don't bother!" Said a voice then. The three of them turned around.

Beverly was standing there with her usual clothes, she was looking at the three of them, expectant. "I heard everything."

Eddie slowly approached her, Beverly was, too. Suddenly, her arms were around him. Eddie could smell her apple cologne.

"I missed you, redhead." Eddie was saying. He had a feeling his reunion with Bev would be like this, Bev was more touchy than Stan was. That's one of the things he loved about her.

Bev then looked at Richie, frowning a little. She got closer to him and the next thing Eddie knew, Richie was already on the floor, touching his cheek. With a face full of pain. Beverly had slapped him, hard.

"Shit!" Richie's right cheek was red. "What was that for?"

"For kidnapping my friend." Beverly simply said.

"I *saved* his life!"

"Okay," Stan said. "Let's not fight about how *right* Beverly is."

Eddie sighed. "Well, now that everything is fine—"

"*Fine?*" Richie asked with indignation. "She *slapped* me!"

"You deserved it, anyway—" Eddie rolled his eyes at Richie.

"So, is it all true?" Beverly asked. "Does he kill demons?"

"I can do *a lot more* things." Richie winked at Beverly, she raised her hand and Richie immediately put his hands up in defense. "Sorry! Sorry! Don't hit me!"

Eddie smiled to himself, the big Richie was scared of Bev's hand.

"I have something to tell you," Beverly said. "There was a demon in my house."

Eddie and Stan had their mouths open in shock, Richie just looked at her curiously.

"*What?*" Eddie and Stan said at the same time.

"It was a black, scaly thing—"

"Like the one in Pandemonium." Eddie said.

Stan then frowned. "So, it was true? He was the one with the knife?"

Beverly had her eyes wide open. "I knew it."

"Please, *mundane*," Richie looked at Beverly. "What happened with the demon?"

"I think I killed it." Beverly said calmly.

Then Richie chuckled under his breath. "*Killed it*, right. Because humans can kill demons suddenly—"

"I used *this*." She said, pointing to the purple necklace around her neck.

"You killed a demon with a necklace?" Stan asked, confused.

"It's a magical necklace. It protected me." Beverly took off the necklace, showing it to them.

"How did you get it?" Eddie asked.

"It was outside my house, with a note, I don't know who sent it."

"Let me see." Richie said.

Beverly handed it to him, but when Richie touched it, the necklace emitted a purple light and Richie dropped it immediately as if it were burning him.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" He was grabbing his hand. "That thing *burned* me."

"Maybe it doesn't like you," Beverly said grabbing the necklace. "Nothing happens to me."

Eddie touched it as well and felt a strong energy, burning him as well. "Ouch!"

"It's like it was made only for Bev." Stan said, looking amused. "So, are we going to search the house or not?" Stan asked.

"We?" said Richie with a sinister delicacy. "I don't remember inviting you along."

"*Richie.*" Eddie said angrily.

The left corner of his mouth curled up. "Just joking." Richie stepped aside to leave a clear path to the door. He looked at Beverly. "Ladies first."

Beverly bumped her shoulder with Richie's as she started walking.

She fumbled for the doorknob in the dark. It opened, triggering the porch light, which illuminated the entryway. The door that led into the bookstore was closed; Then, Stan jiggled the knob too. "It's locked."

"Allow me, mundanes," said Richie, setting him aside. He took his stele out of his pocket and put it to the door. Stan watched him with some resentment.

"He's a piece of work isn't he?" Stan said to Eddie. "How do you stand him?"

"Sometimes I don't."

With a click the door swung open. "Here we go," said Richie, sliding his stele back into his pocket. Eddie saw the Mark on the door—just over his head—fade as they passed through it. The back door opened onto a small storage room, the bare walls peeling paint. Cardboard boxes were stacked everywhere, their contents identified with marker scrawls: FICTION, POETRY, COOKING, LOCAL INTEREST, ROMANCE.

"The apartment's through there." Eddie headed toward the door he'd indicated, at the far end of the room.

Richie caught his arm. "Wait."

Eddie looked at him nervously. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know." He edged between two narrow stacks of boxes, and whistled. "Eddie, you might want to come over here and see this."

Eddie glanced around. It was dim in the storage room, the only illumination the porch light shining through the window. "It's so dark —"

Light flared up, bathing the room in a brilliant glow. Beverly turned her head aside, covering her eyes.

Richie chuckled. He was standing on top of a sealed box, his hand raised. Something glowed in his palm, the light escaping through his cupped fingers. "Witchlight," he said.

Stan muttered something under his breath. Eddie was already clambering through the boxes, pushing a way to Richie. He was standing behind a teetering pile of mysteries, the witchlight casting an eerie glow over his face. "Look at that," Richie said, indicating a space higher up on the wall.

At first Eddie thought he was pointing at what looked like a pair of ornamental sconces. As his eyes adjusted, he realized they were actually loops of metal attached to short chains, the ends of which were sunk into the wall. "Are those—"

"Manacles," said Beverly, picking her way through the boxes.

Stan was looking at it too. "That's, ah ..."

"Don't say 'kinky.'" Eddie shot him a warning look. "This is Jim we're talking about."

Richie reached up to run his hand along the inside of one of the metal loops. When he lowered it, his fingers were dusted with red-brown powder. "Blood. And look." He pointed to the wall right

around where the chains were sunk in; the plaster seemed to bulge outward. “Someone tried to yank these things out of the wall. Tried pretty hard, from the looks of it.”

Eddie’s heart had begun to beat hard inside his chest. “Do you think Jim is all right?”

Richie lowered the witchlight. “I think we’d better find out.”

Notes for the Chapter:

So Ben was a victim of Facebook trolls #JusticeForBill'sStomach lmao.

This was kinda a filler chapter, but I wanted to write the reunion already.

What's so especial about Bev's necklace,??? Why was a demon in her house??? Mmmmmm... Lol I already know, but what do you think??? 7u7

See you next chapter!!!

8. Interrogation

The door to the apartment was unlocked. It led into Jim's living room. Despite the hundreds of books in the store itself, there were hundreds more in the apartment. Bookshelves rose to the ceiling, the volumes on them "double-parked," one row blocking another. Most were poetry and fiction, with plenty of fantasy and mystery thrown in. Eddie remembered plowing through the entirety of *The Chronicles of Prydainhere*, curled up in Jim's window seat as the sun went down over the East River.

"I think he's still around," called Stan, standing in the doorway of Jim's small kitchenette. "The percolator's on and there's coffee here. Still hot."

Eddie peered around the kitchen door. Dishes were stacked in the sink. Jim's jackets were hung neatly on hooks inside the coat closet. He walked down the hallway and opened the door of Jim's small bedroom. It looked the same as ever, the bed with its gray coverlet and flat pillows unmade, the top of the bureau covered in loose change. He turned away. Some part of him had been absolutely certain that when they walked in they'd find the place torn to pieces, and Jim tied up, injured or worse. Now he didn't know what to think.

Numbly he crossed the hall to the little guest bedroom where he'd so often stayed when his mother was out of town on business. They'd stay up late watching old horror movies on the flickering black-and-white TV. Eddie even kept a backpack full of extra things here so he didn't have to lug his stuff back and forth from home.

Kneeling down, he tugged it out from under the bed by its olive green strap. It was covered with buttons, most of which Beverly had given him. *gamers do it better, otaku wench, still not king*. Inside were some folded clothes, a few spare pairs of underwear, even shampoo. *Thank God*, he thought, and kicked the bedroom door closed. Quickly he changed, stripping off Ben's too-big-and now grass-stained and sweaty-clothes, and pulling on a pair of his own baggy green pants, soft as worn paper, and a blue t-shirt with a design of Chinese characters across the front. He tossed Ben's clothes into his backpack, yanked the cord shut, and left the bedroom, the pack bouncing

familiarly between his shoulder blades. It was nice to have something of his own again.

She found Richie in Jim's book-lined office, examining a green duffel bag that lay unzipped across the desk. It was, as Stan had said, full of weapons-sheathed knives, a coiled whip, and something that looked like a razor-edged metal disk.

"It's *achakhram*," said Richie, looking up as Eddie came into the room. "A Sikh weapon. You whirl it around your index finger before releasing it. They're rare and hard to use. Strange that Jim would have one. They used to be Keene's weapon of choice, back in the day. Or so he tells me."

"Jim collects stuff. Art objects. You know," Eddie said, indicating the shelf behind the desk, which was lined with bronze Indian and Russian icons. His favorite was a statuette of the Indian goddess of destruction, Kali, brandishing a sword and a severed head. To the side of the desk was an antique Chinese screen, carved out of glowing rosewood. "Pretty things."

Richie moved the *chakhram* aside gingerly. A handful of clothes spilled out of the untied end of Jim's duffel bag, as if they had been an afterthought. "I think this is yours, by the way."

He drew out a rectangular object hidden among the clothes: a wooden-framed photograph with a long vertical crack along the glass. The crack threw a network of spidery lines across the smiling faces of Jim, Eddie and his mother. "That is mine," Eddie said, taking it out of his hand.

"It's cracked," Beverly pointed out.

"I know. I did that-I smashed it. When I threw it at the Ravener demon." Eddie looked at Richie, seeing the dawning realization on his face. "That means Jim's been back to the apartment since the attack. Maybe even today-"

"He must have been the last person to come through the Portal," said Richie. "That's why it took us here. You weren't thinking of anything, so it sent us to the last place it had been."

"Nice of Dorothea to tell us he was there," said Eddie.

"He probably paid her off to be quiet. Either that or she trusts him more than she trusts us. Which means he might not be-"

"Guys!" It was Stan, dashing into the office in a panic. "Someone's coming."

Eddie dropped the photo. "Is it Jim?"

Stan peered back down the hall, then nodded. "It is. But he's not by himself-there are two men with him."

"Men?" Richie crossed the room in a few strides, peered through the door, and spat a curse under his breath. "Warlocks."

Beverly stared. "Warlocks? But-"

Shaking his head, Richie backed away from the door. "Is there some other way out of here? A back door?"

Eddie shook his head. The sound of footsteps in the hallway was audible now, striking pangs of fear into her chest. Richie looked around desperately. His eyes came to rest on the rosewood screen. "Get behind that," he said, pointing. "Now."

Eddie dropped the fractured photo on the desk and slipped behind the screen, pulling Beverly and Stan after him. Richie was right behind them, his stele in his hand. He had barely concealed himself when Eddie heard the door swing wide open, the sound of people walking into Jim's office-then voices. Three men speaking. Eddie looked nervously at Stan, who was very pale, then at Beverly, who's forehead was sweating, and then at Richie, who had raised the stele in his hand and was moving the tip lightly, in a sort of square shape, across the back of the screen. As Eddie stared, the square went clear, like a pane of glass. He heard Stan suck in his breath-a tiny sound, barely audible-and Richie shook his head at them, mouthing words: *They can't see us through it, but we can see them.*

Biting his lip, Eddie moved to the edge of the square and peered through it, conscious of Stan breathing down his neck. Eddie could see the room beyond perfectly: the bookshelves, the desk with the

duffel bag thrown across it-and Jim, ragged-looking and slightly stooped, his glasses pushed up to the top of his head, standing near the door. It was frightening even though he knew Jim couldn't see him, that the window Richie had made was like the glass in a police station interrogation room: strictly one-way

Jim turned, looking back through the doorway. "Yes, feel free to look around," he said, his tone heavily weighted with sarcasm. "Nice of you to show such an interest."

A low chuckle sounded from the corner of the office. With an impatient flick of the wrist, Richie tapped the frame of his "window," and it opened out wider, showing more of the room. There were two men there with Jim, both in long reddish robes, their hoods pushed back. One was thin, with an elegant gray mustache and pointed beard. When he smiled, he showed blindingly white teeth. The other was burly, thickset as a wrestler, with close-cropped reddish hair. His skin was dark purple and looked shiny over the cheekbones, as if it had been stretched too tight.

"Those are warlocks?" Eddie whispered softly.

Richie didn't answer. He had gone rigid all over, stiff as a bar of iron. *He's afraid I'll make a run for it, try to get to Jim*, Eddie thought. He wished he could reassure Richie that he wouldn't. There was something about those two men, in their thick cloaks the color of arterial blood, that was terrifying.

"Consider this a friendly follow-up, *Hopper*," said the man with the gray mustache. His smile showed teeth so sharp they looked as if they'd been filed to cannibal points.

"There's nothing friendly about you, Brooks." Jim sat down on the edge of his desk, angling his body so it blocked the men's view of his duffel bag and its contents. Now that he was closer, Eddie could see that his face and hands were badly bruised, his fingers scraped and bloody. A long cut along his neck disappeared down into his collar. *What on earth happened to him?*

"Hagarty, don't touch that-it's valuable," Jim said sternly. The big redheaded man, who had picked up the statue of Kali from the top of

the bookcase, ran his beefy fingers over it consideringly. "Nice," he said.

"Ah," said Brooks, taking the statue from his companion. "She who was created to battle a demon who could not be killed by any god or man. 'Oh, Kali, my mother full of bliss! Enchantress of the almighty Shiva, in thy delirious joy thou dancest, clapping thy hands together. Thou art the Mover of all that moves, and we are but thy helpless toys.'"

"Very nice," said Jim. "I didn't know you were a student of the Indian myths."

"All the myths are true," said Brooks, and Eddie felt a small shiver go up his spine. "Or have you forgotten even that?"

"I forget nothing," said Jim. Though he looked relaxed, Eddie could see tension in the lines of his shoulders and mouth. "I suppose Pennywise sent you?"

"He did," said Brooks. "He thought you might have changed your mind."

"There's nothing to change my mind about. I already told you I don't know anything. Nice cloaks, by the way."

"Thanks," said Hagarty with a sly grin. "Skinned them off a couple of dead warlocks."

"Those are official Accord robes, aren't they?" Jim asked. "Are they from the Uprising?"

Brooks chuckled softly. "Spoils of battle."

"Aren't you afraid someone might mistake you for the real thing?"

"Not," said Hagarty, "once they got up close."

Brooks fondled the edge of his robe. "Do you remember the Uprising, Jimothy?" he said softly. "That was a great and terrible day. Do you remember how we trained together for the battle?"

Jimothy, Eddie frowned. *That's his full name?*

Jim's face twisted. "The past is the past. I don't know what to tell you gentlemen. I can't help you now. I don't know anything."

"Anything' is such a general word, so unspecific," said Brooks, sounding melancholy. "Surely someone who owns so many books must know something."

"If you want to know where the Mortal Cup has disappeared to..." said Jim.

"Disappeared might not be quite the correct word," purred Brooks. "Hidden, more like. Hidden by Sonia."

"That may be," said Jim. "So hasn't she told you where it is yet?"

"She has not yet regained consciousness," said Brooks, carving the air with a long-fingered hand. "Pennywise is disappointed. He was looking forward to their reunion."

"I'm sure she didn't reciprocate the sentiment," muttered Jim.

Hagarty cackled. "Jealous, Hopper? Perhaps you no longer feel about her the way you used to."

A trembling had started in Eddie's fingers, so pronounced that he knitted his hands together tightly to try to stop them from shaking. *Sonia? Can they be talking about my mother?*

"I never felt any way about her, particularly," said Jim. "Two Shadowhunters, exiled from their own kind, you can see why we might have banded together. But I'm not going to try to interfere with Pennywise's plans for her, if that's what he's worried about."

"I wouldn't say he was worried," said Hagarty. "More curious. We all wondered if you were still alive. Still recognizably human."

Jim arched his eyebrows. "And?"

"You seem well enough," said Brooks grudgingly. He set the Kali statuette down on the shelf. "There is a child, isn't there? A boy."

Jim looked taken aback. "What?"

"Don't play dumb," said Hagarty in his snarl of a voice. "We know the bitch had a son. They found photos of him in the apartment, a bedroom-"

"I thought you were asking about children of mine," Jim interrupted smoothly. "Yes, Sonia had a son, Edward. I assume he's run off. Did Pennywise send you to find him?"

"Not us," said Brooks. "But he is looking."

"We could search this place," added Hagarty.

"I wouldn't advise it," said Jim, and slid off the desk. There was a certain cold menace to his look as he stared down at the two men, though his expression hadn't changed. "What makes you think he's still alive? I thought Pennywise sent Raveners to scour the place. Enough Ravener poison, and most people will crumble away to ashes, leave no trace behind."

"There was a dead Ravener," said Brooks. "It made Pennywise suspicious."

"Everything makes Pennywise suspicious," said Jim. "Maybe Sonia killed it. She was certainly capable."

Hagarty grunted. "Maybe."

Jim shrugged. "Look, I've got no idea where the boy is, but for what it's worth, I'd guess he's dead. He'd have turned up by now otherwise. Anyway, he's not much of a danger. He's fifteen years old, he's never heard of Pennywise, and he doesn't believe in demons."

Brooks chuckled. "A fortunate child."

"Not anymore," said Jim.

Hagarty raised his eyebrows. "You sound angry, Jimothy."

"I'm not angry, I'm exasperated. I'm not planning on interfering with Pennywise's plans, do you understand that? I'm not a fool."

"Really?" said Hagarty. "It's nice to see that you've developed a healthy respect for your own skin over the years, Jimothy. You weren't always so pragmatic."

"You do know," said Brooks, his tone conversational, "that we'd trade her, Sonia, for the Cup? Safely delivered, right to your door. That's a promise from Pennywise himself."

"I know," said Jim. "I'm not interested. I don't know where your precious Cup is, and I don't want to get involved in your politics. I hate Bob Gray," he added, "but I respect him. I know he'll mow down everyone in his path. I intend to be out of his way when it happens. He's a monster-a killing machine."

"Look who's talking," snarled Hagarty.

"I take it these are your preparations for removing yourself from Pennywise's path?" said Brooks, pointing a long finger at the half-concealed duffel bag on the desk. "Getting out of town, Jimothy?"

Jim nodded slowly. "Going to the country. I plan to lay low for a while."

"We could stop you," said Hagarty. "Make you stay."

Jim smiled. It transformed his face. Suddenly he was no longer the kind, scholarly man who'd pushed Eddie on the swings at the park and taught him how to ride a tricycle. Suddenly there was something feral behind his eyes, something vicious and cold. "You could try."

Brooks glanced at Hagarty, who shook his head once, slowly. Brooks turned back to Jim. "You'll notify us if you experience any sudden memory resurgence?"

Jim was still smiling. "You'll be first on my list to call."

Brooks nodded shortly. "I suppose we'll take our leave. The Angel guard you, Jimothy."

"The Angel does not guard those like me," said Jim. He picked the duffel bag up off the desk and knotted the top. "On your way, gentlemen?"

Lifting their hoods to cover their faces again, the two men left the room, followed a moment later by Jim. He paused a moment at the door, glancing around as if he wondered if he'd forgotten something. Then he shut it carefully behind him.

Eddie stayed where he was, frozen, hearing the front door swing shut and the distant jingle of chain and keys as Jim refastened the padlock. Eddie kept seeing the look on Jim's face, over and over, as he said he wasn't interested in what happened to Eddie's mother.

"That was *intense*." Beverly whispered.

Eddie felt a hand on his shoulder. "Eddie?" It was Stan, his voice hesitant, almost gentle. "Are you okay?"

Eddie shook his head, mutely. He felt far from okay. In fact, he felt like he'd never be okay again.

"Of course he isn't." It was Richie, his voice sharp and cold as ice shards. He took hold of the screen and moved it aside sharply. "At least now we know who would send a demon after your mother. Those men think she has the Mortal Cup."

Eddie felt her lips thin into a straight line. "That's totally ridiculous and impossible."

"Maybe," said Richie, leaning against Jim's desk.

Beverly also put her hand on Eddie's shoulder. "Have you ever seen those men before?"

"No." Eddie shook his head. "Never."

"Jimothy seemed to know them. To be friendly with them." Richie said.

"I wouldn't say friendly," said Stan. "I'd say they were suppressing their hostility."

"They didn't kill him outright," said Richie. "They think he knows more than he's telling."

"Maybe," said Beverly, "or maybe they're just reluctant to kill another Shadowhunter."

Richie laughed, a harsh, almost vicious noise that raised the hairs up on Eddie's arms. "I doubt that."

Eddie looked at him. "What makes you so sure? Do you know them?"

The laughter had gone from Richie's voice entirely when he replied. "Do I know them?" he echoed. "You might say that. Those are the men who murdered my father."

The room went silent, Beverly and Stan looked at each other, both shrugging. Eddie stepped forward to touch Richie's arm. *What did you say to someone who'd just seen his father's killers?* With Ben he said 'Sorry' but Richie was a totally different person. "Richie-

Richie shrugged his touch off as if it stung. "Let's go." Eddie, Stan and Beverly hurried after him.

They left through the back entrance, Richie using his stele to lock up behind them, and made their way out onto the silent street. The moon hung like a locket over the city, casting pearly reflections on the water of the East River. The distant hum of cars going by over the Williamsburg Bridge filled the humid air with a sound like beating wings. Stan said, "Does anyone want to tell me where we're going?"

"To the L train," said Richie calmly.

"You've got to be kidding me," Beverly said, blinking. "Demon slayers take the subway?"

Richie didn't bother to reply.

Eddie was watching Richie as they turned onto Kent Avenue. The lights of the bridge behind them lit Richie's hair to an unlikely halo. His face was expressionless, but something burned at the backs of his tawny eyes. Eddie wondered if it was wrong that he was glad in some way that the men who'd taken his mother were the same men who'd killed Richie's father all those years ago. For now, at least, Richie had to help him find Sonia, whether he wanted to or not.

For now, at least, Richie couldn't leave Eddie alone.

And Eddie was so grateful for that.

Notes for the Chapter:

Jim finally appeared xD

9. Mundanes

"You live *here*?" Stan stood staring up at the old cathedral, with its broken-in windows and doors sealed with yellow police tape. "But it's a church."

Richie reached into the neck of his shirt and pulled out a brass key on the end of a chain. It looked like the sort of key one might use to open an old chest in an attic. Eddie watched him curiously-he hadn't locked the door behind him when they'd left the Institute before, just let it slam shut. "We find it useful to inhabit hallowed ground."

"No offense, but this place is a dump." Beverly said, looking dubiously at the bent iron fence that surrounded the ancient building, the trash piled up beside the steps.

Eddie let his mind relax. He imagined himself taking one of his mother's turpentine rags and dabbing at the view in front of him, cleaning away the glamour as if it were old paint.

"Oh my..." Beverly had her mouth open in surprise, Eddie realized her necklace was glowing.

"It's a glamour, right?" Beverly said. "It doesn't really look like this."

Richie turned around to look at her, astonished. "You can *see* it?"

"See what?" Stan was frowning.

"I think it's the necklace..." Beverly touched it. "I'm starting to think it has superpowers or something."

"Okay, Bev. No need to brag in front of us." Eddie said, chuckling.

Richie fitted the key into the lock, glancing over his shoulder at Stan and Beverly. "I'm not sure you're quite sensible of the honor I'm doing you," he said. "You'll be the first mundanes who has ever been inside the Institute."

"Bring it on." Beverly said, smiling.

Eddie thought longingly of coffee as they made their way up a winding set of stone stairs, each one carved with a glyph. He was beginning to recognize some of them-they tantalized his sight the way half-heard words in a foreign language sometimes tantalized his hearing, as if by just concentrating harder he could force some meaning out of them.

The four of them reached the elevator and rode up in silence. He was still thinking about coffee, big mugs of coffee that were half milk the way his mother would make them in the morning. Sometimes Jim would bring them bags of sweet rolls from the Golden Carriage Bakery in Chinatown. At the thought of Jim, Eddie's stomach tightened, his appetite vanishing.

The elevator came to a hissing stop, and they were again in the entryway Eddie remembered. Richie shrugged off his jacket, threw it over the back of a nearby chair, and whistled through his teeth. In a few seconds Mews appeared, slinking low to the ground, his green eyes gleaming in the dusty air. "Mews," Richie said, kneeling down to stroke the cat's orange head. "Where's Bill, Mews? Where's Keene?"

Mews arched his back and meowed. Richie crinkled his nose, which Eddie might have found cute in other circumstances. "Are they in the library?" He stood up, and Mews shook himself, trotted a little way down the corridor, and glanced back over his shoulder. Richie followed the cat as if this were the most natural thing in the world, indicating with a wave of his hand that Eddie, Stan and Beverly were to fall into step behind him.

"I don't like cats," Stan said, his shoulder bumping Beverly's as they maneuvered the narrow hallway.

"It's unlikely," Richie said, "knowing Mews, that he likes you, either."

They were passing through one of the corridors that were lined with bedrooms. Beverly's eyebrows rose. "How many people live here, exactly?"

"It's an institute," Eddie said. "A place where Shadowhunters can stay when they're in the city. Like a sort of combination safe haven and research facility."

"I thought it was a church." Stan said, looking everywhere.

"It's *inside* a church."

"As if that wasn't ten times more confusing."

Eddie touched Stan's shoulder. "I know it's weird," he said quietly, "but you just have to go along with it. Trust me."

A little shudder passed over Beverly. "This place feels not right to me," she whispered.

They turned through a doorway and found themselves inside a kitchen. It was an enormous kitchen, and unlike the rest of the Institute, it was all modern, with steel counters and glassed-in shelves holding rows of crockery. Next to a red cast-iron stove stood Ben, a round spoon in his hand, his brown hair was not messy anymore. Steam was rising from the pot, and ingredients were strewn everywhere-tomatoes, chopped garlic and onions, strings of dark-looking herbs, grated piles of cheese, some shelled peanuts, a handful of olives, and a whole fish, its eye staring glassily upward.

"I'm making soup," Ben said, waving a spoon at Richie. "Are you hungry? There's cupcakes in the fri-" Ben glanced behind him then, his dark gaze taking in Stan and Beverly as well as Eddie. "Oh, my God," he said with finality. "You brought mundies here? Keene is going to kill you."

"They're my friends." Eddie said.

Ben ignored him. "RICHARD TOZIER," he said. "Explain yourself."

Richie was glaring at the cat. "I told you to bring me to Bill! You selfish little-" Mews rolled onto his back, purring contentedly.

"Don't blame Mews," Ben said. "It's not his fault Keene is going to kill you." Ben plunged the spoon back into the pot. Eddie wondered what exactly peanut-fish-olive-tomato soup tasted like.

Richie said. "Ben-today I saw two of the men who killed my father. Have a little mercy."

Ben's shoulders tightened, but when he turned around, he looked more upset than surprised.

"I'm Stan." Stan said *calmly*. Ben just glared at him, then looked at Beverly. His eyes were scanning her.

"Aren't you going to introduce yourself?"

"Do you care?" Beverly crossed her arms.

"Would I've asked if I didn't?"

"I'm Beverly." She said, without looking at him.

"I'm Ben." He raised a hand to her.

"Good for you." Her arms were still crossed over her chest.

Ben rolled his eyes and muttered "*mundies*", absently dropping a piece offish on the floor. Mews fell on it ravenously.

"No wonder he brought us here," said Richie disgustedly. "I can't believe you've been stuffing him with fish again. He's looking distinctly podgy."

"He does not look podgy. Besides, none of the rest of you ever eat anything. I got this recipe from a website called Tumblr-"

"If you *knew* how to cook, maybe I *would* eat," Richie muttered.

Ben froze, his spoon poised dangerously. "What did you say?"

Richie edged toward the fridge. "I said I'm going to look for a snack to eat."

"That's what I thought you said." Ben returned his attention to the soup. Beverly stared at Ben. Eddie, inexplicably furious, dropped his backpack on the floor and followed Richie to the refrigerator.

"I can't believe you're eating," he hissed.

"I'm *hungry*." Richie inquired with maddening calm. The inside of the fridge was filled with milk cartons whose expiration dates reached

back several weeks, and plastic Tupperware containers labeled with masking tape lettered in red ink: *Keene's. Do Not Eat.*

"Wow, he's like a crazy roommate," Eddie observed, momentarily diverted.

"What, Keene? He just likes things in order." Richie took one of the containers out of the fridge and opened it. "Hmm. Spaghetti." He looked at Eddie. "Want some?"

Eddie shook his head.

"I want some," Stan said suddenly. "I'm hungry."

Richie smiled, mouthful. "I'm sure Ben has a lot of soup, I heard fish has a lot of proteines."

Stan just rolled his eyes and looked at Beverly. She had her phone in her hand and was showing Ben a Twitter page.

"*First, you need an account...*" She was saying, Ben was staring at it as if he was hypnotized.

"Can we go find Keene now?" Eddie said to Richie.

"You seem awfully eager to get out of here."

"Don't you want to tell him what we saw?"

"Not yet." Richie set the container down and thoughtfully licked spaghetti sauce off his knuckle. "But if you want to go so badly-"

"I do."

"Fine." He seemed awfully calm, Eddie thought, not scary-calm as he had been before, but more contained than he ought to be. Eddie wondered how often Richie let glimpses of his real self peek through the façade that was as hard and shiny as the coat of lacquer on one of his mother's Japanese boxes.

"Where are you going?" Stan looked up as they reached the door. Jagged bits of dark hair fell into his eyes; he looked stupidly dazed,

Eddie thought unkindly, as if someone had hit him across the back of the head with a two-by-four. "To find Keene," Eddie said. "I need to tell him about what happened at Jim's."

Ben stared at them. "Are you going to tell him that you saw those men, Richie? The ones that-"

"I don't know." Richie cut Ben off. "So keep it to yourself for now."

He shrugged. "All right. Are you going to come back? Do you want any soup?"

"No," said Richie.

"Do you think Keene will want any soup?"

"No one wants any soup." Richie rolled his eyes, then looked at Eddie. "I'm going to find Keene. Come along or not, it's your choice." The kitchen door swung shut behind him, leaving Eddie standing there.

Ben ladled some of the soup into a bowl and pushed it across the counter toward Stan without looking at him. He was smirking, though-Eddie could feel it. The soup was a dark green color, studded with floating brown things.

"Uh, thanks." Stan said.

"I'm going with Richie," Eddie said. "Stan...?"

"I'm going to stay here." Stan parked himself on a stool. "I'm hungry."

Eddie looked at Bev playing in her phone. "Bev?"

Bev looked up. "I'm staying, I *need* to get to Level 30 of Clash Royale."

Ben looked at her. "*Clash Royale*...?"

Beverly gasped, surprised. "Dude, I have *so much* to teach you."

Eddie was leaving, not before noticing a little blush on Ben's cheeks.

In the hallway Richie was twirling one of the seraph blades between his fingers. He pocketed it when he saw Eddie. "Kind of you to leave the lovebirds with the weirdo."

Eddie suddenly wanted to punch him. "Shut up. Why are you always such an asshat to Stan?"

"Because he's a mundane."

"What about Beverly?"

Richie wasn't even looking at him. "Beverly is more likeable, Stan smells like detergent and talks like an asshat"

"He does not. *You* are the one who talks like that-"

Richie cut him off, "Keene" he said to Mews, who was on the floor, following them. "And *really Keene* this time. Bring us anywhere else, and I'll make you into a tennis racket."

The cat snorted and slunk down the hall ahead of them. Eddie, trailing a little behind Richie, could see the stress and tiredness in the line of Richie's shoulders. He wondered if the tension ever really left Richie.

"Richie." Eddie said.

He looked at him. "What?"

"I'm sorry. For snapping at you."

Richie chuckled. "Which time?"

"You snap at me, too, you know."

"I know," he said, surprising Eddie. "There's something about you that's so-"

"Irritating?"

"Peculiar."

He wanted to ask if Richie meant that in a good or a bad way, but

didn't. He was too afraid Richie'd make a joke out of the answer. Eddie cast about for something else to say. "Does Ben always make dinner for you?" he asked.

"Thank God, no. His mother, Sharon Denbrough, she cooks for us. She's an amazing cook. I learned a lot of recipes from her."

"You cook?" Eddie was smiling a little.

Richie glanced at him sideways. "Yeah, mock everything you like."

"I'm not, I think it's nice. The last time I tried to boil water, the kettle literally went up in flames."

Richie actually *laughed*. A genuine laugh. "Oh, Kaspbrak, you're a mess."

Eddie rolled his eyes, smiling. "I think I prefer *Eds* than Kaspbrak."

"Okay then, *Eds*."

"Can I give you a nickname too?" Eddie looked at Richie's eyes, they were dreamy, like when Ben saw Beverly for the first time.

Before Richie could reply, the cat meowed. He was crouched at the foot of a metal spiral staircase that spun up into a hazy half-light overhead. "So he's in the greenhouse," Richie said. It took Eddie a moment before he realized Richie was speaking to the cat. "No surprise there."

"The greenhouse?" Eddie said.

Richie swung himself onto the first step. "Keene likes it up there. He grows medicinal plants, things we can use. Most of them only grow in Derry. I think it reminds him of home."

They had reached the top of the stairs. A set of double doors greeted them, carved with patterns of leaves and vines. Richie shouldered them open.

The smell struck Eddie the moment he passed through the doors: a green, sharp smell, the smell of living and growing things, of dirt and

the roots that grew in dirt. Eddie exhaled. "It smells like..."*Springtime*, he thought, *before the heat comes and crushes the leaves into pulp and withers the petals off the flowers.*

"Home," said Richie, "to me." He pushed aside a hanging frond and ducked past it. Eddie followed.

The greenhouse was laid out in what seemed to Eddie's untrained eye no particular pattern, but everywhere he looked was a riot of color: blue purple blossoms spilling down the side of a shining green hedge, a trailing vine studded with jewel-toned orange buds. They emerged into a cleared space where a low granite bench rested against the bole of a drooping tree with silvery green leaves. Water glimmered in a stone-bound rock pool. Keene sat on the bench, his black bird perched on his shoulder. He had been staring thoughtfully down at the water, but looked skyward at their approach. Eddie followed his gaze upward and saw the glass roof of the greenhouse shining above them like the surface of an inverted lake.

"You look like you're waiting for something," Richie observed, breaking a leaf off a nearby bough and twirling it between his fingers. For someone who seemed so contained, he had a lot of nervous habits. Perhaps he just liked to be constantly in motion.

"I was lost in thought." Keene rose from the bench, stretching out his arm for Gard. The smile faded from his face as he looked at them. "What happened? You look as if-

"We were attacked. Forsaken."

Eddie almost had forgotten about the demon, *a lot of things* had happened those few hours they left the Institute.

"Forsaken warriors? Here?" Keene asked.

"Warrior," said Richie.

"We only saw one."

"But Dorothea said there were more," Eddie added.

"Dorothea?" Keene held a hand up. "This might be easier if you took

events in order."

"Right." Richie gave Eddie a warning look, cutting him off before he could start talking. Then Richie launched into a recital of the afternoon's events, leaving out some things, that the men in Jim's apartment had been the same men who'd killed his father seven years ago. Beverly's necklace. That Beverly and Stan were in this moment talking about *Clash Royal* in the kitchen. "Eddie's mother's friend-or whatever he is, really-goes by the name Jim Hopper" Richie finished finally. "But while we were at his house, the two men who claimed they were emissaries of Pennywise referred to him as Jimothy Hopper."

"And their names were..."

"Brooks," said Richie. "And Hagarty."

Keene had gone very pale. Against his gray skin the scar along his cheek stood out like a twist of red wire. "It is as I feared," he said, half to himself. "The Circle is rising again."

Eddie looked at Richie for clarification, but he seemed as puzzled as Eddie was. "The Circle?" he said.

Keene was shaking his head as if trying to clear cobwebs from his brain. "Come with me," he said. "It's time I showed you something."

The gas lamps were lit in the library, and the polished oak surfaces of the furniture seemed to smolder like somber jewels. Streaked with shadows, the stark faces of the angels holding up the enormous desk looked even more suffused with pain. Eddie sat on the red sofa, legs drawn up, Richie leaning restlessly against the sofa arm beside Eddie. "Keene, if you need help looking-"

"Not at all." Keene emerged from behind the desk, brushing dust from the knees of his trousers. "I've found it."

He was carrying a large book bound in brown leather. He paged through it with an anxious finger, blinking owl-like behind his glasses and muttering: "Where... where... ah, here it is!" He cleared his

throat before he read aloud: *"I hereby render unconditional obedience to the Circle and its principles....I will be ready to risk my life at any time for the Circle, in order to preserve the purity of the bloodlines of Derry, and for the mortal world with whose safety we are charged."*

Richie made a face. "What was that from?"

"It was the loyalty oath of the Circle of Raziel, twenty years ago," said Keene, sounding strangely tired.

"It sounds creepy," said Eddie. "Like a fascist organization or something."

Keene set the book down. He looked as pained and grave as the statuary angels beneath the desk. "They were a group," he said slowly, "of Shadowhunters, led by Pennywise, dedicated to wiping out all Downworlders and returning the world to a 'purer' state. Their plan was to wait for the Downworlders to arrive in Derry to sign the Accords. They must be signed again each fifteen years, to keep their magic potent," he added, for Eddie's benefit. "Then, they planned to slaughter them all, unarmed and defenseless. This terrible act, they thought, would spark off a war between humans and Downworlders one they intended to win."

"That was the Uprising," said Richie, finally recognizing in Keene's story one that was already familiar to him. "I didn't know Pennywise and his followers had a name."

"The name isn't spoken often nowadays," said Keene. "Their existence remains an embarrassment to the Clave. Most documents pertaining to them have been destroyed."

"Then why do you have a copy of that oath?" Richie asked.

Keene hesitated—only for a moment, but Eddie saw it, and felt a small and inexplicable shiver of apprehension run up his spine. "Because," Keene said, finally, "I helped write it."

Richie looked up at that. "You were in the Circle."

"I was. Many of us were." Keene was looking straight ahead. "Eddie's mother as well."

Eddie jerked back as if he'd slapped him. *"What?"*

"I said-"

"I know what you said! My mother would never have belonged to something like that. Some kind of-some kind of hate group."

"It wasn't-," Richie began, but Keene cut him off.

"I doubt," Keene said slowly, as if the words pained him, "that she had much choice."

Eddie stared. "What are you talking about? Why wouldn't she have had a choice?"

"Because," said Keene, "she was Pennywise's wife."

10. Know Your Enemy

Eddie and Richie began speaking at once

"Pennywise had a wife? He was married? I thought—"

"That's impossible! My mother would never—she was only ever married to my father! She didn't have an ex-husband!"

Keene raised his hands wearily. "Children—"

"I'm not a child." Eddie spun away from the desk. "And I don't want to hear any more."

"Eddie" said Keene. The kindness in his voice hurt; Eddie turned slowly, and looked at him across the room. He thought how odd it was that, with his gray hair and scarred face, he looked so much older than his mother. And yet they had been "young people" together, had joined the Circle together, had known Pennywise together. "My mother wouldn't ..." he began, and trailed off. He was no longer sure how well he knew Sonia. His mother had become a stranger to him, a liar, a hider of secrets. *What wouldn't she have done?*

"Your mother left the Circle," said Keene. He didn't move toward him but watched Eddie across the room with a bird's bright-eyed stillness. "Once we realized how extreme Pennywise's views had become—once we knew what he was prepared to do—many of us left. Jim was the first to leave. That was a blow to Keene. They had been very close." Keene shook his head. "Then Wentworth Tozier. Your father, Richie."

Richie raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

"There were those who stayed loyal. Brooks. Hagarty. The Denbroughs—"

"The Denbroughs? You mean Zack and Sharon?" Richie looked thunderstruck. "What about you? When did you leave?"

"I didn't," said Keene softly. "Neither did they We were afraid, too

afraid of what he might do. After the Uprising the loyalists like Hagarty and Brooks fled. We stayed and cooperated with the Clave. Gave them names. Helped them track down the ones who had run away. For that we received clemency.”

“Clemency?” Richie’s look was quick, but Keene saw it.

He said, “They cursed me here, I can never leave this place. You always assumed it was a vengeance spell cast by an angry demon or warlock. I let you think it. But it is not the truth. The curse that binds me was cast by the Clave.”

“For being in the Circle?” Richie asked, his face a mask of astonishment.

“For not leaving it before the Uprising.”

“But the Denbroughs weren’t punished,” Eddie said. “Why not? They’d done the same thing you’d done.”

“There were extenuating circumstances in their case—they were married; they had a child. Although it is not as if they reside in this outpost, far from home, by their own choice. We were banished here, the three of us—the four of us, I should say; Bill was a squalling baby when we left the Glass City. They can return to Derry on official business only, and then only for short times. I can never return. I will never see the Glass City again.”

Richie stared. It was as if he were looking at his tutor with new eyes, Eddie thought, though it wasn’t Richie who had changed. He said, ““The Law is hard, but it is the Law.””

“I taught you that,” said Keene, dry amusement in his voice. “And now you turn my lessons back at me. Rightly too.” He looked as if he wanted to sink down into a nearby chair, but held himself upright nevertheless. In his rigid posture there was something of the soldier he had once been, Eddie thought.

“Why didn’t you tell me before?” Eddie said. “That my mother was married to Pennywise. You knew her name—”

“I knew her as Sonia Henderson, not Sonia Kaspbrak” said Keene.

"And you were so insistent on her ignorance of the Shadow World, you convinced me it could not be the Sonia I knew—and perhaps I did not want to believe it. No one would wish for Pennywise's return." He shook his head again. "When I sent for the Brothers of the Bone City this morning, I had no idea just what news we would have for them," he said. "When the Clave finds out Pennywise may have returned, that he is seeking the Cup, there will be an uproar. I can only hope it does not disrupt the Accords."

"I bet Pennywise would like that," Richie said. "But why does he want the Cup so badly?"

Keene's face was gray. "Isn't that obvious?" he said. "So he can build himself an army."

Richie looked startled. "But that would never—"

"Dinnertime!" It was Ben standing framed in the door of the library. He still had the spoon in his hand. "Sorry if I'm interrupting," he added, as an afterthought.

"Dear God," said Richie. "Please spare us tonight."

Keene l alarmed. "I—I—I had a very filling breakfast," he stammered. "I mean lunch. A filling lunch. I couldn't possibly eat—"

"I threw out the soup," Ben said. "And ordered Chinese from that place downtown."

Richie unhitched himself from the desk and stretched. "Great. I'm starved."

"I might be able to eat a bite," admitted Keene meekly.

"You two are terrible liars," said Ben darkly. "Look, I know you don't like my cooking—"

"So stop doing it," Richie advised him reasonably. "Did you order mu shu pork? You know I love mu shu pork."

Ben cast his eyes skyward. "Yes. It's in the kitchen."

"Awesome." Richie ducked by him with an affectionate ruffle of

Ben's hair. Keene went after him, pausing only to pat Ben on the shoulder—then he was gone, with a funny apologetic duck of the head. Had Eddie really only a few minutes before been able to see the ghost in him of his old warrior self?

Ben was looking after Richie and Keene, twisting the spoon in his scarred, pale fingers. Eddie said, "Is he really?"

Ben didn't look at him. "Is who really what?"

"Richie. Is he really a terrible liar?"

Now Ben did turn his eyes on Eddie, and they were large and dark and unexpectedly thoughtful. "He's not a liar at all. Not about important things. He'll tell you horrible truths, but he won't lie." He paused before he added quietly, "That's why it's generally better not to ask him anything unless you know you can stand to hear the answer."

Turns out, Keene wasn't angry at Richie for bringing Stan and Bev at the Institute. But he was surprised.

The kitchen was warm and full of light and the salt-sweet smell of takeout Chinese food. The smell reminded Eddie of home; he sat and looked at his glistening plate of noodles, toyed with his fork, and tried not to look at Ben, who was staring at Beverly as if she was the reason of Ben's existence.

"Well, I think it's kind of romantic," said Ben.

"What is?" Stan asked.

"That whole business about Eddie's mother being married to Pennywise" said Ben. Richie and Keene had filled him in, though Eddie noted that both had left out the part about the Denbroughs having been in the Circle, and the curses the Clave had handed down. "So now he's back from the dead and he's come looking for her. Maybe he wants to get back together."

"Hey guys-" Bill had showed up in the kitchen, and was staring at

Stan and Beverly. "Who—"

"There's *another* one?" Beverly asked.

Ben let out a sigh. "Bill, these are Beverly and Stan, Eddie's friends."

Bill frowned and looked at Richie, "You b-brought *mundanes*—"

"Bill, I thought your grudge against mundanes was gone."

"I wasn't a-angry, I'm just c-confused."

Eddie looked at him. "Hey, Bill."

Bill's frown disappeared. "H-hey." Then he looked at Eddie's friends. "I'm B-Bill Denbrough."

Beverly just waved her hand at him, and Stan was staring at Bill on concentration.

"Are you *stuttering*? Or just nervous?" Stan said.

"Stan!" Eddie hissed.

Bill just blushed and cleared his throat. "I try to reduce it as m-much as possible."

"It's fine, Bill." Ben said, "Have some food."

Bill hesitated. "Did you—"

"No, Bill. I did not cooked it. Now eat." Ben sounded tired.

Nobody had asked Bill where he'd been, and he hadn't offered the information. He was sitting next to Richie, across from Eddie, and was avoiding looking at Stan. Richie had given Bill a brief summary of what was going on.

"I doubt Pennywise sent a Ravener demon to Sonia's house because he wants to 'get back together,'" Stan said.

"That sounds like a cartoon name." Beverly tried to make a joke, but gave it up when she saw Eddie staring at her. "So why does

Pennywise want this Cup so bad, and why does he think Eddie's mom has it?" she asked.

"You said it was so he could make an army," Eddie said, turning to Keene. "You mean because you can use the Cup to make Shadowhunters?"

"Yes."

"So Pennywise could just walk up to any guy on the street and make a Shadowhunter out of him? Just with the Cup?" Stan leaned forward. "Would it work on me?"

Keene gave him a long and measured look. "Possibly," he said. "But most likely, you're too old. The Cup works on children. An adult would either be unaffected by the process entirely, or killed outright."

"A child army," said Ben softly.

"I don't know," said Stan. "Turning a bunch of kids into warriors—I've heard of worse stuff happening. I don't see the big deal about keeping the Cup away from him."

"Leaving out that he would inevitably use this army to launch an attack on the Clave," Keene said dryly, "the reason that only a few humans are selected to be turned into Nephilim is that most would never survive the transition. It takes special strength and resilience. Before they can be turned, they must be extensively tested—but Pennywise would never bother with that. He would use the Cup on any child he could capture, and cull out the twenty percent who survived to be his army."

"But that's m-murder," said Bill, who looked a little green. "He was talking about k-killing children."

"He said that we had made the world safe for humans for a thousand years," said Keene, "and now was their time to repay us with their own sacrifice."

"Their children?" demanded Richie, his cheeks flushed. "That goes against everything we're supposed to be about. Protecting the

helpless, safeguarding humanity—”

Keene pushed his plate away. “Pennywise was insane,” he said. “Brilliant, but insane. He cared about nothing but killing demons and Downworlders. Nothing but making the world pure. He would have sacrificed his own son for the cause and could not understand how anyone else would not.”

“He had a son?” said Beverly.

“I was speaking figuratively,” said Keene, reaching for his handkerchief. He used it to mop his forehead before returning it to his pocket. His hand, Eddie saw, was trembling slightly. “When his land burned, when his home was destroyed, it was assumed that he had burned himself and the Cup to ashes rather than relinquish either to the Clave. His bones were found in the ashes, along with the bones of his wife.”

“But my mother lived,” said Eddie. “She didn’t die in that fire.”

“And neither, it seems now, did Pennywise,” said Keene. “The Clave will not be pleased to have been fooled. But more importantly, they will want to secure the Cup. And more importantly than that, they will want to make sure Pennywise does not.”

“It seems to me that the first thing we’d better do is find Eddie’s mother,” said Richie. “Find her, find the Cup, get it before Pennywise does.”

This sounded fine to Eddie, but Keene looked at Richie as if he’d proposed juggling nitroglycerine as a solution. “Absolutely not.”

“Then what do we do?”

“Nothing,” Keene said. “All this is best left to skilled, experienced Shadowhunters.”

“I am skilled,” protested Richie. “I am experienced.”

Keene’s tone was firm, nearly parental. “I know that you are, but you’re still a child, or nearly one.”

Richie looked at Keene through slitted eyes. His lashes were long, casting shadows down over his angular cheekbones. In someone else it would have been a shy look, even an apologetic one, but on Richie it looked narrow and menacing. "I am not a child."

"Keene is right," said Bill. He was looking at Richie, and Eddie thought that he must be one of the few people in the world who looked at Richie not as if he were afraid of him, but as if he were afraid *for* him. "Pennywise is dangerous. I know you're a g-good Shadowhunter. You're probably the b-best our age. But Pennywise's o-one of the best there ever was. It took a huge battle to b-bring him down."

"And he didn't exactly stay down," said Ben examining his fork tines. "Apparently."

"But we're here," said Richie. "We're here and because of the Accords, nobody else is. If we don't do something—"

"We are going to do something," said Keene "I'll send the Clave a message tonight. They could have a force of Nephilim here by tomorrow if they wanted. They'll take care of this. You have done more than enough."

"But what about my mother?" Eddie demanded. "She can't wait for some representative from the Clave to show up. Pennywise has her right now—Brooks and Hagarty said so—and he could be ..." He couldn't bring himself to say the word "torture," but Eddie knew he wasn't the only one thinking it. Suddenly no one at the table could meet his eyes.

"I thought the Clave was pledged to protect people. Shouldn't there be Shadowhunters here right now? Shouldn't they already be searching for her?" Eddie said to no one in particular.

"That would be easier," snapped Ben, "if we had the slightest idea where to look."

"But we do," said Richie.

"You do?" Eddie looked at him, startled and eager. "Where?"

"Here." Richie forward and touched his fingers to the side of Eddie's temple, so gently that a flush crept up Eddie's face. "Everything we need to know is locked up in your head, under that pretty hair of yours."

Eddie reached up to touch his hair protectively. "I don't think—"

"So what are you going to do?" Stan asked sharply. "Cut his head open to get at it?"

Richie's eyes sparked, but he said calmly, "Not at all. The Silent Brothers can help him retrieve his memories."

"You hate the Silent Brothers," protested Ben.

"I don't hate them," said Richie candidly. "I'm afraid of them. It's not the same thing."

"They sound like librarians?" Beverly said.

"The Silent Brothers are archivists, but that is not all they are," said Keene sounding as if he were running out of patience. "In order to strengthen their minds, they have chosen to take upon themselves some of the most powerful runes ever created. The power of these runes is so great that the use of them—" He broke off and Eddie heard Richie's voice in his head, saying: They mutilate themselves. "Well, it warps and twists their physical forms. They are not warriors in the sense that other Shadowhunters are warriors. Their powers are of the mind, not the body."

"They can read minds?" Eddie said in a small voice.

"Among other things. They are among the most feared of all demon hunters."

"I don't know," said Stan, "it doesn't sound so bad to me. I'd rather have someone mess around inside my head than chop it off."

"Then you're a bigger idiot than you look," said Richie, regarding him with scorn.

"R-Richie is right," said Bill, ignoring Stan. "The Silent Brothers are

really creepy.”

Keene's hand was clenched on the table. “They are very powerful,” he said. “They walk in darkness and do not speak, but they can crack open a man’s mind the way you might crack open a walnut—and leave him screaming alone in the dark if that is what they desire.”

Eddie looked at Richie, appalled. “You want to give me to *them*?”

“What's in your mind belongs to you,” Richie leaned across the table. “Someone’s hidden secrets there, secrets you can’t see. Don’t you want to know the truth about your own life?”

“I don’t want someone else inside my head,” he said weakly. Eddie knew Richie was right, but the idea of turning himself over to beings that even the Shadowhunters thought were creepy sent a chill through his blood.

“I’ll go with you,” said Richie. “I’ll stay with you while they do it.”

“That’s enough.” Stan had stood up from the table, red with anger. “Leave him alone.”

Richie looked at him as if he’d just noticed him. “Why are you still here?”

Stan ignored him. “I said, leave him alone.”

“I should've listened to Keene, the Institute is sworn to shelter Shadowhunters, not their mundane friends. Especially when they’ve worn out their welcome.

“I’ll show them out.” Ben said, standing up.

Beverly also was standing up, looking at Richie. “If we leave, Eddie is coming with us.”

“I don't think so, this is Shadowhunter business. By all means, mundanes, go.” Richie wasn't even looking at her.

Beverly was furious now. “What is your *problem* with us? You are just jealous that—”

"Please, don't fight." Keene was rubbing his temples.

"Let Eddie decide," Richie was looking at Eddie. "Do you want answers about your mother or not?"

Eddie was speechless, he looked at Beverly and Stan, his best friends since they were kids. Then he looked at Richie, the person who had saved his life and showed him the truth about his mother.

He shook his head, looking at Beverly. With his eyes pleading. *Please, he may be the only one who can help me.* Beverly just shook her head and grabbed Stan's arm, leaving the kitchen. The main door being slammed could be heard.

Eddie just stared at the ground. "I want to go to sleep."

"You've hardly eaten anything—" Richie protested.

Eddie brushed aside Richie's hand. "I'm not hungry."

It was cooler in the hallway than it had been in the kitchen. Eddie leaned against the wall, pulling at his shirt, which was sticking to the cold sweat on his chest. Far down the hall, in the main window, he could see Beverly's and Stan's retreating figures, swallowed up by shadows. *Had he lost his best friends tonight?* If there was one thing Eddie was learning from all this, it was how easy it was to lose everything you had always thought you'd have forever.

Notes for the Chapter:

Omgg stenbrough and benverly finally met!!! <333
Richie was an asshole I know, lmao

11. Easy Is The Descent

The room was all gold and white, with high walls that gleamed like enamel, and a roof, high above, clear and glittering like diamonds. Eddie was wearing a green jacket too big for him and elegant white pants, it was weird, he'd never dressed like that before.

"I never thoguht I'd see this place." Said someone behind Eddie, it was Stan, he was wearing black, like a Shadowhunter, it showed his coloring to good advantage: dark hair, white skin, white teeth. He looks happy, Eddie thought.

"Me neither, I've never seen anything like it." Eddie turned again as they passed a champagne fountain: an enormous silver dish, the centerpiece a mermaid with a jar pouring sparkling wine down her bare back. People were filling their glasses from the dish, laughing and talking. The mermaid turned her head as Eddie passed, and smiled. The smile showedwhite teeth as sharp as a vampire's.

"Where's Bill?" Eddie asked, Stan suddenly stopped dancing and stared at him.

"I don't know..."

Eddie laughed. "How could you not know? You're-"

"Welcome to the Glass City," said a voice that wasn't Stan's. Eddie found that Stan had disappeared and he was now dancing with Richie, who was wearing a black suit, if Stan had been wearing one, Eddie would've laughed. But Richie looked hadsome. There was a bronze chain around Richie's throat, and his hair and eyes looked more beautiful than ever.

"Where's Stan?" Eddie asked as they spun again around the champagne fountain. Eddie saw Beverly there, wearing a long pink dress, Ben was there too, wearing a black suit, holding Beverly's hand.

"This place is for the living," said Richie. His hands were placed on Eddie's waist.

Eddie narrowed his eyes at him. "What do you mean?"

Richie sighed. "You look beautiful in this light."

Eddie could feel the blood rushing to his face. "W-What?"

Richie leaned closer to Eddie. "Can I kiss you now?" he whispered. Eddie's heart was beating fast.

"N... Yes"

"Wake up, Eds." Richie whispered to his ear. "Wake up, before they find out what you did."

"What are you-"

"Wake up!" Richie shouted.

Eddie bolted upright in bed, gasping. His wrists were held in a hard grip; he tried to pull away, then realized who was restraining him. "Richie?"

"Yeah." Richie was sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Let go of me."

"Sorry." His fingers slipped from Eddie's wrists. "You tried to hit me the second I said your name."

"I'm a little jumpy, I guess." Eddie glanced around. He was in a small bedroom furnished in dark wood. By the quality of the faint light coming in through the half-open window, he guessed it was dawn, or just after. His backpack was propped against one wall. "How did I get here? I don't remember..."

"I found you asleep on the floor in the hallway." Richie sounded amused. "Bill helped me get you into bed. Thought you'd be more comfortable in a guest room than in the infirmary."

"Wow. I don't remember anything." Eddie ran his hands through his hair. "What time is it, anyway?"

"About five."

"In the morning?" He glared at Richie. "You'd better have a good reason for waking me up."

"Why, were you having a good dream?"

Eddie could still hear music in his ears, Richie's warm hands on his waist. "I don't remember."

Richie stood up. "One of the Silent Brothers is here to see you. Keene sent me to wake you up. Actually, he offered to wake you up himself, but since it's five a.m., I figured you'd be less cranky if you had something nice to look at."

"Meaning *you*?"

"What else?"

"You just have to meet Brother Murray. That's all. You might even like him. He's got a great sense of humor for a guy who never says anything."

Eddie closed his eyes. "Get out. Get out so I can change."

"It's not like you have something I don't."

Eddie glared at him.

"Fine, fine."

Eddie swung his legs out of bed the moment the door shut behind Richie. Though it was barely dawn, humid heat was already beginning to gather in the room. He pushed the window shut and went into the bathroom to wash his face and rinse his mouth, which tasted like old paper.

Five minutes later he was sliding his feet into his green sneakers. He'd changed into blue shorts and a plain black T-shirt and went to join Richie in the hallway.

Mews was there with him, muttering and circling restlessly.

"What's with the cat?" Eddie asked.

"The Silent Brothers make him nervous."

"Sounds like they make everyone nervous."

Richie smiled thinly. Mews meowed as they set off down the hall, but didn't follow them. At least the thick stones of the cathedral walls still held some of the night's chill: The corridors were dark and cool.

When they reached the library, Eddie saw Keene was sat behind the enormous desk in a suit, his gray-streaked hair silvered by the dawn light, the he saw a tall man in a heavy robe that fell from neck to foot, covering him completely. The hood of the robe was raised, hiding his face. The robe itself was the color of parchment, and the intricate runic designs along the hem and sleeves looked as if they had been inked there in drying blood.

"This," said Keene, "is Brother Murray of the Silent City."

The man came toward them, his heavy cloak swirling as he moved, and Eddie realized what it was about him that was strange: The man made no sound at all as he walked, not the slightest footstep. Even his cloak, which should have rustled, was silent.

"And this, Murray," Keene said, rising from his desk, "is the boy I wrote to you about. Edward Kaspbrak."

The hooded face turned slowly toward Eddie. He felt cold to his fingertips. "Hello," Eddie said.

There was no reply. "I decided you were right, Richie," said Keene. "I sent a letter to the Clave about all this last night, but Eddie's memories are his own. Only *he* can decide how he wants to deal with the contents of his own head. If he wants the help of the Silent Brothers, he should have that choice."

Eddie said nothing. Dorothea had said there was a block in his mind, hiding something. Of course he wanted to know what it was. But the shadowy figure of the Silent Brother was so-well, *silent*. Silence itself seemed to flow from him like a dark tide, black and thick as ink. It chilled Eddie's bones. Brother Murray's face was still turned toward

Eddie, nothing but darkness visible underneath his hood. *This is Sonia's son?"*

Eddie gave a little gasp, stepping back. The words had echoed inside his head, as if he'd thought them himself-but he hadn't.

"Yes," said Keene, and added quickly, "but his father was a mundane."

That does not matter, said Murray. *The blood of the Clave is dominant.*

"Why did you call my mother Sonia?" said Eddie, searching in vain for some sign of a face beneath the hood. "Did you know her?"

"The Brothers keep records on all members of the Clave," explained Keene. "Exhaustive records-"

"Not that exhaustive," said Richie, "if they didn't even know Sonia was still alive."

It is likely that she had the assistance of a warlock or witch in her disappearance. Most Shadowhunters cannot so easily escape the Clave. There was no emotion in Murray's voice; he sounded neither approving nor disapproving of Sonia's actions.

"There's something I don't understand," Eddie said. "Why would Pennywise think my mom had the Mortal Cup? If she went through so much trouble to disappear, like you said, then why would she bring it with her?"

"To keep him from getting his hands on it," said Keene. "She above all people would have known what would happen if Pennywise had the Cup. And I imagine she didn't trust the Clave to hold on to it. Not after Pennywise got it away from them in the first place."

"I guess." Eddie couldn't keep the doubt from his voice. The whole thing seemed so unlikely. He tried to picture his mother fleeing under cover of darkness, with a big gold cup stashed in the pocket of her overalls, and failed.

"Sonia turned against her husband when she found out what he intended to do with the Cup," said Keene. "It's not unreasonable to assume she would do everything in her power to keep the Cup from

falling into his hands. The Clave themselves would have looked first to her if they'd thought she was still alive."

"It seems to me," Eddie said with an edge to his voice, "that no one the Clave thinks is dead, is ever actually dead. Maybe they should invest in dental records."

"My father's dead," said Richie, the same edge in his voice. "I don't need dental records to tell me that."

Eddie turned to him in some exasperation. "I didn't mean-"

That is enough, interrupted Brother Murray. *There is truth to be learned here, if you are patient enough to listen to it.*

With a quick gesture he raised his hands and drew the hood back from his face. Forgetting Richie, Eddie fought the urge to cry out. The archivist's head was bald, smooth and white as an egg, darkly indented where his eyes had once been. They were gone now. His lips were crisscrossed with a pattern of dark lines that resembled surgical stitches. Eddie understood now what Richie had meant by mutilation.

The Brothers of the Silent City do not lie, said Murray *If you want the truth from me, you shall have it, but I shall ask of you the same in return.*

Eddie lifted his chin. "I'm not a liar either."

The mind cannot lie. Murray moved towards Eddie. *It is your memories I want.*

Eddie looked at Keene. "I don't know..."

"Eddie" It was Keene, his tone gentle. "It's entirely possible that there are memories you have buried or repressed, memories formed when you were too young to have a conscious recollection of them, that Brother Murray can reach. It could help us a great deal."

Eddie said nothing, biting the inside of his lip. He hated the idea of someone reaching inside his head, touching memories so private and hidden that even he couldn't reach them.

"Eddie doesn't have to do anything he doesn't want to do," Richie said

suddenly. "Does he?"

Eddie interrupted Keene. "It's all right. I'll do it."

Brother Murray nodded curtly, his narrow white hands came up to touch Eddie's face. The skin of his fingers was thin as parchment paper, inked all over with runes. Eddie could feel the power in them, jumping like static electricity to sting his skin. He closed his eyes, but not before he saw the worried expression that crossed Richie's face.

Eddie felt as if he were pressed up against something hard and unyielding, being slowly crushed. He heard himself gasp and went suddenly cold all over, cold as winter. In a flash he saw an icy street, gray buildings looming overhead, an explosion of whiteness stinging his face in freezing particles-

"That's *enough*." Richie's voice cut through the winter chill, and the falling snow vanished, a shower of white sparks. Eddie's eyes sprang open.

Slowly the library came back into focus-the book-lined walls, the anxious faces of Keene and Richie.

Richie put his warm hand on Eddie's shoulder, it made Eddie remember the dream. "Are you all right?"

Slowly, Eddie moved his head in a nod. The crushing weight had gone, but he could feel the sweat that pasted his shirt to his back like sticky tape.

There is a block in your mind, said Brother Murray. *Your memories cannot be reached.*

"A block?" asked Richie. "You mean he's repressed his memories?"

No. I mean they have been blocked from his conscious mind by a spell. I cannot break it here. He will have to come to the Bone City and stand before the Brotherhood.

"A *spell*?" said Eddie, incredulously. "Who would have put a spell on me?"

Nobody answered him. Richie looked at his tutor. He was surprisingly pale, Eddie thought, considering that this had been his idea. "Keene he shouldn't have to go if he doesn't-"

"It's all right." Eddie took a deep breath. His palms ached where his nails had cut them, and he wanted badly to lie down somewhere dark and rest. "I'll go. I want to know the truth. I want to know what's in my head."

Richie nodded once. "Fine. Then I'll go with you."

"God, I hate him." Stan said suddenly.

Beverly looked at him. "You hate *God*?"

"No. *I hate Richie.*"

Beverly and Stan were lying in Stan's bed, which was filled with packages of gummy bears. They had both come straight to Stan's house after leaving the Institute, and Stan suggested that they should eat many gummy bears as they could to hide their anger.

"Don't you hate him?" Stan said looking at the ceiling.

"I don't really know him, but he's an asshole."

"He's the *king* of assholes. That should be a thing, King Of Assholes."

Beverly laughed, "Maybe he's the kind of asshole who's an asshole at first and then finds true love and stops being an asshole."

"How did we ended up talking about *assholes*?"

"I don't know," Beverly sighed. "The others were nice, though."

"Yeah, you were eating Ben with your eyes, *as if he was made of chocolate.*" Stan said, imitating Beverly's voice at the last part.

Bev giggled. "I wasn't, but he's cute." She raised an eyebrow at Stan. "I caught *you* staring at Bill."

Stan opened his mouth in surprise. "I'm not gay."

Bev rolled her eyes, "I only said you were staring at Bill, not that you were gay."

Stan closed his eyes, Beverly could see his cheeks turning red. She found an opportunity. "Why don't you say it already?"

"Say what?"

Bev raised an eyebrow.

Stan was flushing more now. Then sighed. "Please, don't tell Eddie-"

"OH MY GOD! I WAS ONLY JOKING!" Beverly was shouting, then covered her mouth. "YOU'RE GAY?!"

"SHH! My mom will hear us!"

Bev was in shock, she couldn't believe *Stan The Man*, as she used to call him when they were kids, was gay. When Eddie had come out, they were thirteen and Stan used to to tease him afterwards.

"Why the hell- Why didn't you tell us?" Beverly was happy and confused at the same time.

"I didn't think it was *that* important." Stan rolled his eyes.

"So, you *do* like Bill?"

Stan frowned. "W-What? No!"

Beverly just smirked. "But, why didn't you want to tell Eddie? He will be okay with it."

Stan remained quiet for a few seconds. "It's just ... I don't know, I guess it's because when he had come out, I teased him so hard about it. Now I know that it was because I was trying to hide the fact that I was-" He looked down. "I haven't told my parents, I'm *sure* they'll hate me."

Bev touched his shoulder. "Hey, if they don't accept you, that's their

loss. I have a spare room in my house. You can live there and we could have a slumber party everynight."

Stan chuckled under his breath. "Thanks, Bev."

"Or we can go back to the Institute to *live* there you know?"

"Ugh, no thank you."

"I'm just saying-"

"Do you think Eddie is safe there?" Stan interrupted her, he was now sitting on his bed.

"I like to think so," Beverly was standing know. "Why?"

"This whole *Pennywise* thing. A few days ago all I had to worry about was not getting acne for school and now..."

Beverly inhaled. "I feel the same way." She said. "Now we have to worry about a rogue demon-killer who uses a clown's name. Who would've thought."

"Is this the part where you gave me the pep talk about confronting our fears and go to the Institute to accept our destiny?"

"What? No," She frowned. "I was just gonna buy more gummy bears."

Notes for the Chapter:

This was kinda a filler chapter, but I wanted to write a little nice scene with Bev and Stan bc they're cute as friends.

lmao i hope u enjoyed <33333

12. City Of Bones

Notes for the Chapter:

Get "reddie" for some Richie + Eddie moments lol
Btw, Brother Murray is the same Murray from stranger things lmao. Ironical that he's a silent brother.
xD

Leaving the Institute was like climbing into a wet, hot canvas bag. Humid air pressed down on the city, turning the air to grimy soup. "I don't see why we have to leave separately from Brother Murray," Eddie grumbled. They were standing on the corner outside the Institute. The streets were deserted except for a garbage truck trundling slowly down the block. "What, is he embarrassed to be seen with Shadowhunters or something?"

"The Brotherhood *are* Shadowhunters," Richie pointed out. Somehow he managed to look cool despite the heat.

"I suppose he went to get his car?" Eddie inquired sarcastically.

Richie grinned. "Something like that."

Eddie shook his head. "You know, I'd feel a lot better about this if Keene had come with us."

"What, I'm not protection enough for you?"

"It's not protection I need right now-it's someone who can help me think." Suddenly reminded, he clapped a hand over his mouth. "Oh-Stan!"

"No, I'm Richie," said Richie patiently. "Stan is the weaselly little one with the bad haircut and dismal fashion sense."

"Oh, shut up," he replied, but it was more automatic than heartfelt. "I meant to call him and Beverly before I went to sleep. See if they got home okay."

"They're probably at home lying in a puddle of their own drool."

Eddie rolled his eyes but didn't replied, it would be pointless. Lost in thought, it took Eddie several moments to realize that Richie had been saying something to him. When he blinked at Richie, he saw a wry grin spread across Richie's face. "What?" he asked, ungraciously.

"I wish you'd stop desperately trying to get my attention like this," Richie said. "It's become embarrassing."

"Sorry, what were you saying?"

"I just-"

As if on cue, a narrow black car with tinted windows rumbled up to the curb and paused in front of Richie, engine purring. It was long and sleek and low to the ground like a limousine, the windows curved outward.

Richie looked at Eddie sideways; there was amusement in his glance, but also a certain urgency. Eddie glanced at the car again, letting his gaze relax, letting the strength of what was real pierce the veil of glamour.

Now the car looked like Cinderella's carriage, except instead of being pink and gold and blue like an Easter egg, it was black as velvet, its windows darkly tinted. The wheels were black, the leather trimmings all black. On the black metal driver's bench sat Brother Murray, holding a set of reins in his gloved hands. His face was hidden beneath the cowl of his parchment-colored robe. On the other end of the reins were two horses, black as smoke, snarling and pawing at the sky

"Get in," said Richie. When Eddie continued to stand there gaping, he took Eddie's arm and half-pushed him in through the open door of the carriage, swinging himself up after Eddie. The carriage began to move before Richie had closed the door behind them. He fell back in his seat-plush and glossily upholstered-and looked over at Eddie, as if he wanted to say something, but didn't say anything.

Eddie would have thought that a horse and carriage wouldn't have stood a chance in Manhattan traffic, but they were moving downtown easily, their soundless progression unnoticed by the snarl of taxis,

buses, and SUVs that choked the avenue. In front of them a yellow cab switched lanes, cutting off their forward progress. Eddie tensed, worried about the horses-then the carriage lurched upward as the horses sprang lightly to the top of the cab. He choked off a gasp.

The carriage, rather than dragging along the ground, sailed up behind the horses, rolling lightly and soundlessly up and over the cab's roof and down the other side. Eddie glanced backward as the carriage hit the pavement again with a jolt-the cab driver was smoking and staring ahead, utterly oblivious. "I always thought cab drivers didn't pay attention to traffic, but this is ridiculous," he said weakly.

"Just because you can see through glamour now..." Richie let the end of the sentence hang delicately in the air between them.

"I can only see through it when I concentrate," Eddie said. "It hurts my head a little."

"I bet that's because of the block in your mind. The Brothers will take care of that."

"God, this place reminds me of that Twenty One Pilots song."

Richie looked at him blankly.

"Twenty One Pilots, you know ... *'All my friends are Heathens...'*" Eddie tried to sing, but Richie just looked at him as if he was crazy. "Really? I suppose you don't have much time for enjoying music," Eddie said, thinking of Stan, for whom music was his entire life, "in your line of work."

He shrugged. "Maybe the occasional wailing chorus of the damned."

"But you were playing the piano yesterday," Eddie began, "at the Institute. So you must-"

The carriage lurched upward again. Eddie grabbed at the edge of his seat and stared-they were rolling along the top of a downtown M1 bus. From this vantage point he could see the upper floors of the old apartment buildings that lined the avenue, elaborately carved with gargoyles and ornamental cornices.

"I was just messing around," Richie said. "My father insisted I learn to play an instrument."

"He sounds strict, your father."

"Not really, he was just a fan of art."

"It must be nice to have a father." Eddie stared at the window.

"How was he?" Richie asked. "Your father, I mean."

Eddie sighed. "I only know things my mom told me" he said. "He was a military, he married my mom when she was twenty-nine." He remembered the painting at his house. "My mom had a lot of his medals and a box with his initials. But now ... I don't even know if what she told me is true." Eddie looked at Richie who was staring right at him, his tawny eyes almost shining. "You said your dad was killed, what about your mom?"

Richie now wasn't looking at Eddie, instead he was staring at his hands.

"It's fine if you don't want to tell me-" Eddie was ready to drop the subject but Richie shook his head.

"I was six," he said. "It was raining, my parents were sleeping in the couch and I was there too, staring at the window, looking the rain soak everything. I was only six but in that moment it felt like I was the only one in the world." Eddie remembered Ben's words. *'He'll tell you horrible truths, but he won't lie.'* Richie kept talking. "I didn't realize there was a demon in the house until I heard my father scream, I'd never heard him scream before, I turned around and the first thing I saw was my mother's body, covered in blood. The demon was writhing in the floor, dying."

Eddie didn't know if he wanted to keep listening. "Richie-"

"My father had her body in her arms, crying." Richie continued. "My mother had her eyes open, looking at me. I realized I was the last thing she saw before dying-"

"Richie, don't," He said, putting his hands on top of Richie's. "Do not

blame yourself for that."

"With my father was different," It was as if Eddie hadn't talked. "We lived in a manor house, out in the country. My father always said it was safer away from people. I heard them coming up the drive and went to tell him. He told me to hide, so I hid. Under the stairs. I saw those men come in. They had others with them. Not men. Forsaken. They overpowered my father and cut his throat. The blood ran across the floor. It soaked my shoes. I didn't move."

"I'm so sorry, Chee." Eddie realized what he said and he blushed. "I-sorry- it came out of nowhere-"

"I like it." Richie said. "*Eds.*" Richie gave him a little smile, and Eddie realized it wasn't the typical smug smile he usually gave people. This was the real Richie. "I'm sorry that your friends hate you because of me."

Eddie didn't say anything, just nodded. It was the first time he witnessed Richie being vulnerable like this.

"So,-" Eddie said. "The Cup-"

"Wow," Richie said. "I thought we were having a *moment* here, Eds."

Eddie pulled away from him, his face burning in the darkness, and turned to look out the window. They were rolling toward a heavy wrought iron gate, trellised with dark vines. Eddie realized his heart was beating faster than normal. *What the hell is going on with me?*, Eddie thought.

"Shut up, Trashmouth." Eddie said without thinking. Richie laughed when he heard that.

"I think I prefer *Chee* than *Trashmouth*." Richie said, in a sharp voice, obviously imitating Eddie.

Eddie smiled. "Okay then, *Chee*." he said in a deep voice, imitating Richie.

Richie was about to say something else, but instead looked at his window. "We're here," announced Richie as the smooth roll of wheels

over pavement turned to the jounce of cobblestones. Eddie glimpsed words across the arch as they rolled under it: NEW YORK CITY MARBLE CEMETERY.

"But they stopped burying people in Manhattan a century ago because they ran out of room-didn't they?" Eddie said. They were moving down a narrow alley with high stone walls on either side.

"The Bone City has been here longer than that." The carriage came to a shuddering halt. Eddie jumped as Richie stretched his arm out, but he was only reaching past Eddie to open the door on his side. Richie's arm was lightly muscled, Eddie noticed for the first time.

"You don't get a choice, do you?" Eddie asked. "About being a Shadowhunter. You can't just opt out."

"No," he said. The door swung open, letting in a blast of muggy air. The carriage had drawn to a stop on a wide square of green grass surrounded by mossy marble walls. "But if I had a choice, this is still what I'd choose."

"Why?" he asked.

Richie raised an eyebrow, which made Eddie instantly jealous. He'd always wanted to be able to do that. "Because," he said. "It's what I'm good at."

There it was, the old Richie had come out of the surface.

Richie jumped down from the carriage. Eddie slid to the edge of his seat, dangling his legs. It was a long drop to the cobblestones. He jumped. The impact stung his feet, but he didn't fall. He swung around in triumph to find Richie watching him. "I would have helped you down," Richie said.

Eddie blinked "It's okay. You didn't have to."

Eddie saw Brother Murray descending from his perch behind the horses in a silent fall of robes. He cast no shadow on the sun-baked grass.

Come, Murray said. He glided away from the carriage and the

comforting lights of Second Avenue, moving toward the dark center of the garden. It was clear that he expected them to follow.

The grass was dry and crackling underfoot, the marble walls to either side smooth and pearly. There were names carved into the stone of the walls, names and dates. It took Eddie a moment to realize that they were grave markers. A chill scraped up his spine. Where were the bodies? In the walls, buried upright as if they'd been walled in alive ...?

He had forgotten to look where he was going. When he collided with something unmistakably alive, he yelped out loud.

It was Richie. "Don't screech like that. You'll wake the dead."

Eddie frowned at him. "Why are we stopping?"

He pointed at Brother Murray, who had come to a halt in front of a statue just slightly taller than he was, its base overgrown with moss. The statue was of an angel.

The marble of the statue was so smooth it was almost translucent. The face of the angel was fierce and beautiful and sad. In long white hands the angel held a cup, its rim studded with marble jewels. Something about the statue tickled Eddie's memory with an uneasy familiarity. There was a date inscribed on the base, 1234, and words inscribed around it: NEPHILIM: FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNO.

"Is that meant to be the Mortal Cup?" he asked.

Richie. "And that's the motto of the Nephilim—the Shadowhunters—there on the base."

"What does it mean?"

It means, said Murray, *"The descent into Hell is easy."*

"Nice and cheery," said Eddie, but a shiver passed over his skin despite the heat.

"It's the Brothers' little joke, having that here," said Richie. "You'll see."

Eddie looked at Brother Murray. He had drawn a stele, faintly glowing, from some inner pocket of his robe, and with the tip he traced the pattern of a rune on the statue's base. The mouth of the stone angel suddenly gaped wide in a silent scream, and a yawning black hole opened in the grassy turf at Murray's feet. It looked like an open grave.

A set of granite steps led down into the hole, their edges worn soft by years of use.

Eddie had barely set his foot on the first step when he felt his arm caught in a cold grip. He looked up in astonishment. Brother Murray was holding his wrist, his icy white fingers digging into the skin. Eddie could see the bony gleam of his scarred face beneath the edge of his cowl.

Do not fear, said his voice inside Eddie's head. *It would take more than a single human cry to wake these dead.*

The stairs ended in a shallow landing; ahead of them stretched a tunnel, long and black, ridged with the curling roots of trees. A faint bluish light was visible at the tunnel's end. "It's so ... dark," Eddie said lamely.

"You want me to hold your hand?" Richie said, Eddie thought he was joking but then he saw Richie's serious face.

Eddie put both his hands behind his back like a small child. "Don't talk down to me."

"Well, I could hardly talk up to you. You're too short." Richie glanced past Eddie, the torch showering sparks as he moved. "No need to stand on ceremony, Brother Murray," he drawled. "Lead on. We'll be right behind you."

Eddie jumped. He still wasn't used to the archivist's silent comings and goings. Murray moved noiselessly from where he had been standing behind Eddie and headed into the tunnel.

After a moment Eddie followed, without realizing he was holding Richie's hand as they walked into darkness.

After a few minutes of walking, they arrived at a even more dark place, It was a block of white stone, smooth and square, with a sort of door inset into the front. It reminded her of a child-size playhouse, almost but not quite big enough for Eddie to stand up inside.

"It's a mausoleum," said Richie, directing a flash of torchlight at it. Eddie could see that a rune was carved into the door, which was sealed shut with bolts of iron. "A tomb. We bury our dead here."

"All your dead?" Eddie said, half-wanting to ask Richie if his father was buried here, but he had already moved ahead, out of earshot. Eddie hurried after him, not wanting to be alone with Brother Murray in this spooky place. "I thought you said this was a library."

There are many levels to the Silent City, interjected Murray. And not all the dead are buried here. There is another ossuary in Derry, of course, much larger. But on this level are the mausoleums and the place of burning.

"The place of burning?"

Those who die in battle are burned, their ashes used to make the marble arches that you see here. The blood and bone of demon slayers is itself a powerful protection against evil. Even in death, the Clave serves the cause.

How exhausting, Eddie thought, to fight all your life and then be expected to continue that fight even when your life was over. At the edges of his vision he could see the square white vaults rising on either side of him in orderly rows of tombs, each door locked from the outside. He understood now why this was called the Silent City: Its only inhabitants were the mute Brothers and the dead they so zealously guarded.

They had reached another staircase leading down into more twilight; Richie thrust the torch ahead of him, streaking the walls with shadows. "We're going to the second level, where the archives and the council rooms are," he said, as if to reassure Eddie.

At the foot of the stairs was another tunnel, which widened out at the

end into a square pavilion, each corner of which was marked by a spire of carved bone. Torches burned in long onyx holders along the sides of the square, and the air smelled of ashes and smoke. At the center there was a square, made of black marble and embossed with a parabolic design of silver stars. There was a table in front of it, where more figures in dark robes were standing, beside the table.

Murray wasted no time. *We have arrived. Edward, stand before the Council.*

Eddie stepped into the center of the black square as if he were stepping in front of a firing squad. He raised his head. "All right," he said. "Now what?"

The Council greets you, Edward Kaspbrak, he heard, and it was not just one silent voice inside his head but a dozen, some low and rough, some smooth and monotone, but all were demanding, insistent, pushing at the fragile barriers around his mind.

The Brother who sat in the center seat templed his thin white fingers beneath his chin. *It is an interesting puzzle, admittedly, he said, and the voice inside Eddie's mind was dry and neutral. But there is no need for the use of force, if you do not resist.*

Eddie gritted his teeth. He wanted to resist them, wanted to pry those intrusive voices out of his head. To stand by and allow such a violation of his most intimate, personal self—

But it was the only way, the only way to find out he truth.

The first contact came as a whisper inside his head, delicate as the brush of a falling leaf. *State your name for The Council.*

Edward Kaspbrak.

The first voice was joined by others. *Who are you?*

I'm Eddie. My mother is Sonia Kaspbrak. I live at 807 Berkeley Place in Brooklyn. I am fifteen years old. My father's name was—

His mind seemed to snap in on itself, like a rubber band, and he reeled soundlessly into a whirlwind of images cast against the insides

of his closed eyelids.

Eddie stood on top of a flight of stairs, looking down a narrow corridor, and there was Jim again, his green duffel bag at his feet. Sonia stood in front of him, shaking her head. "Why now, Jimothy? I thought that you were dead ..." Eddie blinked; Jim looked different, almost a stranger, bearded, his hair long and tangled—and branches came down to block Eddie's view; he was now in the park, and green faeries, tiny as toothpicks, buzzed among the red flowers. Eddie reached for one in delight, and his mother swung him up into her arms with a cry of terror.

Then it was winter on the black street again, and they were hurrying, huddled under an umbrella, Sonia half-pushing and half-dragging Eddie be the looming banks of snow. A granite doorway loomed up out of the falling whiteness; there were numbers carved above the door: 011. Then, Eddie was standing inside an entryway that smelled of iron and melting snow. His fingers were numb with cold. A hand under his chin directed him to look up, and he saw a row of words scrawled along the wall. Two words leaped out at him, burning into his eyes: JANE IVES.

A sudden pain lanced through his right arm. Eddie shrieked as the images fell away and he spun upward, breaking the surface of consciousness like a diver breaking up through a wave. There was something cold pressed against his cheek. He pried his eyes open and saw silver stars. He blinked twice before he realized that he was lying on the marble floor, his knees curled up to his chest.

There was blood on his shirt. He looked around, and saw Richie looking at him, unmoving but very tense around the mouth.

Jane Ives. The words meant something, but what? Before he could ask the question aloud, Murray interrupted him.

The block inside your mind is stronger than we had anticipated, he said. It can be safely undone only by the one who put it there. For us to remove it would be to kill you.

Eddie scrambled to his feet, cradling his arm. "But I don't know who put it there. If I knew that, I wouldn't have come here."

The answer to that is woven into the thread of your thoughts, said Brother Murray. In your waking dream you saw it written.

"Jane Ives? But—that's not even a name!"

It is enough. Brother Murray got to his feet. As if this were a signal, the rest of the Brothers rose alongside him. They inclined their heads toward Richie, a gesture of silent acknowledgment, before they filed away among the pillars and were gone. Only Brother Murray remained. He watched impassively as Richie hurried over to Eddie.

"Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine, confused, but fine."

"What was the name you saw?" Richie was frowning.

"Jane Ives." Eddie sighed. "I don't even know who that is."

"I do." Richie said suddenly. Eddie stared at him in surprise. "She's a witch, a very powerful one. But everyone knows her by a nickname."

"What is it?" Eddie asked, his head was throbbing. "I hope it's not some strange language."

"It's not," Richie said, looking serious. "Everyone calls her Eleven."

Notes for the Chapter:

Eleven is coming, bitches!!!! Lmao <3333

13. Being Human

"Turn left! Left! I said to take Broadway, you brain-dead moron!" Richie was screaming in the taxi.

The taxi driver responded by jerking the wheel so hard to the left that Eddie was thrown against Richie. He let out a yelp of resentment. "Why are we taking Broadway, anyway?"

"I'm starving," Richie said. "And there's nothing at home except leftover Chinese." He took his phone out of his pocket and started dialing. "Bill! Wake up!" he shouted. Eddie could hear an irritated buzzing on the other end. "Meet us at Taki's. Breakfast. Yeah, you heard me. Breakfast. What? It's only a few blocks away. Get going."

He clicked off and shoved the phone into one of his many pockets as they pulled up to a curb. Handing the driver a wad of bills, Richie elbowed Eddie out of the car. When he landed on the pavement behind Eddie, he stretched like a cat and spread his arms wide. "Welcome to the greatest restaurant in New York."

It didn't look like much—a low brick building that sagged in the middle like a collapsed soufflé. A battered neon sign proclaiming the restaurant's name hung sideways and was sputtering. Two men in long coats and tipped-forward felt hats slouched in front of the narrow doorway. There were no windows.

"It looks like a prison," said Eddie.

He pointed at Eddie. "But in prison could you order a spaghetti fra diavolo that makes you want to kiss your fingers? I don't think so."

"I don't want spaghetti, I want to find Eleven."

Richie said. "She could be *anywhere*. So its either spaghetti or nothing."

"Is she a witch you've *heard* of?" demanded Eddie, who was rapidly tiring of Richie's reasonable voice.

"Hey!" It was Bill, looking like he'd rolled out of bed and pulled jeans

on over his pajamas. His hair, unbrushed, stuck out wildly around his head. He loped toward them, eyes on Richie and Eddie. "Ben's on his w-way," he said. "He's bringing the m-mundanes."

Eddie opened his mouth, "Really? Where did they come from?"

"They showed up f-first thing this morning. Couldn't s-stay away from you I guess." Bill sounded amused. "Anyway, are we going in or w-what? I'm starving."

They were stopped at the front door by one of the slouching men. As he straightened, Eddie caught a glimpse of his face under the hat. His skin was dark red, his squared-off hands ending in blue-black nails. Eddie felt himself stiffen, but Richie and Bill seemed unconcerned. They said something to the man, who nodded and stepped back, allowing them to pass.

"Richie," Eddie hissed as the door shut behind them. "Who was *that*?"

"You mean Clancy?" Richie asked, glancing around the brightly lit restaurant. It was pleasant inside, despite the lack of windows. Cozy wooden booths nestled up against each other, each one lined with brightly colored cushions. Endearingly mismatched crockery lined the counter, behind which stood a blond girl in a waitress's pink-and-white apron, nimbly counting out change to a stocky man in a flannel shirt. She saw Richie, waved, and gestured that they should sit wherever they wanted. "Clancy keeps out undesirables," said Richie.

"He's a *demon*," Eddie hissed. Several customers turned to look at him—a boy with spiky blue dreads was sitting next to a beautiful Indian girl with long black hair and gauzelike golden wings sprouting from her back. The boy frowned darkly. Eddie was glad the restaurant was almost empty.

"No, he isn't," said Richie, sliding to a booth. Eddie moved to sit beside him, but Bill was already there. Eddie settled gingerly onto the booth seat opposite them, his arm still stiff.

"He's an ifrit," Bill explained. "They're w-warlocks with no magic. Half d-demons who can't cast spells for whatever r-reason."

"Poor bastards," said Richie, picking up his menu. Eddie picked his up too, and stared. Locusts and honey were featured as a special, as were plates of raw meat, whole raw fish, and something called a toasted bat sandwich. A page of the beverage section was devoted to the different types of blood they had on tap—to Eddie's relief, they were different kinds of animal blood, rather than type A, type O, or type B-negative.

"Who eats whole raw fish?" Eddie inquired aloud.

"Kelpies," said Bill. "S-selkies. Maybe the o-occasional nixie."

"Faeries?" Eddie asked.

"Don't order any of the faerie food," said Richie, looking at Eddie over the top of his menu. "It tends to make humans little crazy. One minute you're munching a faerie plum, the next minute you're running naked down Madison Avenue with antlers on your head. Not," he added hastily, "that this has ever happened to me."

Bill laughed. "Do you remember—" he began, and launched into a story that contained so many mysterious names and proper nouns that Eddie didn't even bother trying to follow it. He was looking at Bill instead, watching him as he talked to Richie. There was a kinetic, almost feverish energy to him that hadn't been there before. Something about Richie sharpened him, brought him into focus. If Eddie were going to draw them together, he thought, he would make Richie a little blurry, while Bill stood out, all sharp, clear planes and angles.

Richie looked up as the waitress passed. "Are we ever going to get any coffee?" he said aloud, interrupting Bill midsentence.

Bill subsided, his energy fading. "I ..."

Eddie spoke up hastily. "What's all the raw meat for?" he asked, indicating the third page of his menu.

"Werewolves," said Richie. "Though I don't mind a bloody steak myself every once in a while." He reached across the table and flipped Eddie's menu over. "Human food is on the back."

Eddie perused the perfectly ordinary menu selections with a feeling of stupefaction. It was all too much. "They have *smoothies* here?"

"Really delicious smoothies," Said Ben, with Beverly and Stan at his side. They smiled briefly at Eddie, he did the same.

"Shove over," Ben said to Richie, while Stan and Beverly seated beside Eddie.

"So how did it go at the Bone City?" Ben asked, flipping his menu open. "Did you find out what's in Eddie's head?"

"We got a name," said Richie. "Jane—"

"*Shut up*," Bill hissed, thwacking Richie with his closed menu.

Richie looked injured. "Jesus." He rubbed his arm. "What's your problem?"

"This p-place is full of Downworlders. You know that. I think y-you should try to keep the details of our investigation s-secret."

"*Investigation*?" Beverly laughed. "Now we're detectives? Maybe we should all have code names."

"Good idea," said Stan. "I'll be Stan The Man, Eddie will be Yoda, Richie will be King Asshole, Bill will be Stuttering-"

"Shut up," Bill looked angry. It was the first time he talked directly to Stan.

"Stan-" Eddie started.

"What? I'm not making fun of his stutter, I think it's cute." Stan realized what he said and cleared his throat. "I mean, stuttering in general."

Eddie watched Beverly, she was staring at Stan, as if she knew something Eddie didn't.

At that moment the waitress arrived to take their order. Up close she was still a pretty blond girl, but her eyes were unnerving—entirely

blue, with no white or pupil at all. She smiled with sharp little teeth. "Know what you're having?"

Richie grinned. "The usual," he said, and got a smile from the waitress in return.

"Me too," Ben chimed in, though he didn't get the smile. Beverly fastidiously ordered a fruit smoothie without sugar, Stan and Bill asked for coffee, and Eddie, after a moment's hesitation, chose a large coffee and coconut pancakes. The waitress winked a blue eye at him and flounced off.

"Is she an ifrit too?" Eddie asked, watching her go.

"Betty? No. Part fey, I think," said Richie.

"She's got nixie eyes," said Ben thoughtfully.

"You really don't know what she is?" asked Stan.

Richie shook his head. "I respect her privacy. Hey, let me out for a second." He said to Bill and Ben. They moved aside.

Eddie watched Richie as he strode over to Betty, who was leaning against the bar, talking to the cook through the pass-through to the kitchen. All Eddie could see of the cook was a bent head in a white chef's hat. Tall furry ears poked through holes cut into either side of the hat.

Betty turned to smile at Richie, who put an arm around her. She snuggled in. Eddie wondered if this was what Richie meant by *respecting her privacy*.

Ben rolled his eyes. "He really shouldn't tease the waitstaff like that."

Eddie looked at Ben. "You don't think he means it? That he likes her, I mean."

Ben shrugged. "She's a Downworlder," he said, as if that explained everything.

"I don't get it," said Stan.

Bill glanced at him without interest. "Get what?"

"This whole Downworlder thing. You don't hunt them, because they aren't exactly demons, but they're not exactly people, either. Vampires kill; they drink blood—"

"Only rogue vampires d-drink human blood from living people," Said Bill, Eddie noticed he was struggling to not stutter. "And *those*, w-we're allowed to kill."

"And werewolves are what? Just overgrown puppies?" Beverly interjected.

"They kill demons," said Ben. "So if they don't bother us, we don't bother them."

Like letting spiders live because they eat mosquitoes, Eddie thought. "So they're good enough to let live, good enough to make your food for you, good enough to flirt with—but not *really* good enough? I mean, not as good as people."

Ben and Bill looked at him as if he were speaking Chinese. "Different from people," said Bill finally.

"Better than mundanes?" said Stan.

"No," Ben said decidedly. "You could turn a mundane into a Shadowhunter. I mean, we came from mundanes. But you could never turn a Downworlder into one of the Clave. They can't withstand the runes."

"So they're weak?" asked Beverly.

"I wouldn't say that," said Richie, sliding back into his seat next to Ben. His hair was mussed and there was a lipstick mark on his cheek. "At least not with a peri, a djinn, an ifrit, and God knows what else listening in." He grinned as Betty appeared and distributed their food. Eddie regarded his pancakes consideringly. They looked fantastic: golden brown, drenched with honey. He took a bite as Betty wobbled off on her high heels.

They were delicious.

"I told you it was the greatest restaurant in Manhattan," said Richie, eating fries with his fingers.

Eddie looked at his friends. "Do you want some?"

Beverly and Stan shook their heads at the same time. "We already had our doze of sugar in Stan's house." Beverly said.

"You had a *gummy bear* party without me?" Eddie wasn't angry, just confused. He glanced at Stan, who was stirring his coffee, head down.

Richie sighed. "We may not always like Downworlders, but they don't always like us, either. A few hundred years of the Accords can't wipe out a thousand years of hostility." He said, not wanting to listen to the gummy bear conversation.

"I think he d-doesn't know what the Accords are, Richie." Bill said.

"I do, actually," said Eddie.

"Wait." Beverly suddenly sat up straight. "What did you say that name was?" she demanded, looking at Richie. "The name in Eddie's head."

"I didn't," said Richie. "At least, I didn't finish it. It's Jane Ives." He grinned at Bill mockingly. Bill rolled his eyes.

"*Eleven?*" Ben was frowning.

"I don't understand." Stan said, but everyone ignored him.

"It can't be—but I'm almost totally sure—" Beverly dug into her purse and pulled out a folded piece of pink paper. She wiggled it between her fingers. "Look at this."

Stan held out his hand for the paper, glanced at it with a shrug, and handed it to Eddie. "It's a party invitation. For somewhere in Brooklyn," he said. "I hate Brooklyn."

"Stan, you've never been in Brooklyn." Eddie said, then he looked at Beverly. "Where did you get this, Bev?"

She shrugged. "There was a guy in Pandemonium who said it would be awesome, he had a whole stack of them. I kept it because I liked the design."

"What is it?" Richie demanded impatiently. "Are you going to show the rest of us, or not?"

Eddie turned it around so they could all read it. It was printed on thin pink paper, nearly parchment, in a thin, elegant, spidery hand. It announced a gathering at the humble home of Jane Ives: the Magnificent Sorceress and promised attendees "*a rapturous evening of delights beyond your wildest imaginings.*"

"Jane Ives," said Stan. "The same Jane Ives from Eddie's mind?"

"I doubt there are that many witches named Jane Ives in the Tristate Area," said Richie. "Why did they give this to *you*?" He said looking at Beverly.

"What do you mean?" Beverly asked.

"Eleven only invites Downworlders to her parties," Said Ben. "It's weird they're inviting *mundanes*."

"How could I know?" Beverly said.

"It says she's the *High Witch of Brooklyn*." Eddie said. "That sounds like a strong title."

"Maybe she's just egocentric like *some* people are." Stan said, looking directly at Richie.

Richie shrugged. "Maybe, or maybe she just wants to draw attention, like *some* people do." Richie was also looking directly at Stan.

Eddie sighed, and ate his pancake.

"So, w-what are we gonna do?" Bill said, after finishing his coffee.

"It's obvious." Richie said. "We're gonna crash a party."

The party didn't start until midnight, so with a whole day to kill, Richie and Bill disappeared to the weapons room and Ben and Beverly announced their intention of going for a walk in Central Park so that he could show her the faerie circles. Beverly asked Eddie and Stan if they wanted to come along. But both refused, with the excuse of being tired.

"Why does Richie hate me?" Stan suddenly asked. They were laying on Eddie's bed, horizontally. Eddie was so distracted thinking about everything that had happened. *Why* would there be a block in his mind? Why would a powerful witch have put it there, and to what purpose? He wondered what memories he might have lost, what experiences he'd had that he couldn't now recall. Or maybe everything he thought he *did* remember was a lie ... ?

Stan repeated the question and Eddie looked at him. "Richie hates everyone." Eddie answered automatically.

"He treats Beverly differently than me."

Eddie raised an eyebrow, without realizing it. "*Why* do you want Richie to like you?"

"I don't. I just want to know why." Stan closed his eyes.

"Then ask him." Eddie shrugged. "Maybe it's your haircut." Then he giggled.

Stan elbowed him. "Hey, my hair is stunning."

"Stunningly boring." Then Eddie laughed as if he'd made the most amazing joke in the world.

"Your hair is so simple." Stan let out. "You look like those kids from the boring commercials."

Eddie put a hand on his chest and gasped dramatically. "Stanley Uris! You have disgraced me."

Then they both cracked up, covering their mouths because they were laughing so loudly.

"Jesus!" Stan said. "I think I peed myself."

"Ew!" Eddie was still laughing, "Go to the bathroom, idiot."

"I prefer peeing in Richie's bed." Stan put his hands behind his head.

Eddie rolled his eyes and sighed. "Stan, I'm scared."

Stan looked at him frowning. "Why?"

"Aren't you?" Eddie asked looking at Stan, he looked so calm. "I'm surprised that you and Bev are acting normal."

"Oh, I'm scared," Stan said standing up and looking at Eddie. "I'm pretty sure Bev is scared too, I guess we put a serious face because we know how much all of this means to you."

Eddie was standing now, and went to the small window of the room, the sun was almost hiding, he could see a few kids playing with a ball, a Dalmatian running around, a couple holding hands...

"Keene told me fear is natural," Eddie said, he could feel Stan watching him. "It's part of what makes me human. But now ... I'm not even human-"

"What are you talking about?" Stan was behind Eddie and putting his arm in Eddie's shoulder. "You're just as human as me and Bev, don't forget that."

"Am I? I feel like I'm disappointing human Eddie," Eddie exhaled. "The Eddie who had a normal life, who didn't believe in demons or Shadowhunters-"

"You're still the same Eddie, the same Eddie who hates bacon on their hamburguers, the same Eddie who loves drawing, the same Eddie who's too short for his age, the same Eddie who's obsessed with cleaning his house-"

"I'm not *that* obsessed." Eddie turned around to watch Stan.

"My point is ... You're still *you*, my *best friend*. And to me, you are more human than most people."

Eddie smiled and hugged him, he realized Richie was right. Stan smelled like detergent, but in that moment, Eddie couldn't change that for the world.

"Well, now that we're having a bonding time," Stan said, "I have something to tell-

Eddie sighed. "I know you're gay, Stan." He was still hugging him.

Stan was speechless for a few seconds, "Did Beverly tell you? I'm gonna-

"I always knew," Eddie let go of the hug and touched Stan's shoulder. "Come on, I've known you since we were five."

"Then, why didn't you say anything?"

"I wanted you to tell me yourself." He smiled, "Anyway, thank you for making me forget everything for a minute."

Stan let out a breath, "Well, I need fresh air, I'm probably gonna spy on Bev. Do you want to come with me?"

Eddie shook his head. "I'll stay here, thinking."

Stan stared at him in concern. "If you need company, you know where to find us." He said and left the room.

Eddie stared at the door for a second, his mind was full of darting images. He kept seeing his mother's face looking down at him, her expression panicked. Kept seeing the Speaking Stars, hearing the voices of the Silent Brothers in his head. He walked out into the corridor and toward the library. Maybe Keene could help him.

But the library was empty. Afternoon light slanted in through the parted curtains, laying bars of gold across the floor. On the desk lay the book Keene had read out of earlier, its worn leather cover gleaming. Beside it Gard slept on his perch, beak tucked under wing.

He crossed the room hastily and laid his hands on the book. It felt warm, the leather heated by sunlight. He raised the cover. Something folded slid out from between the pages and fluttered to the floor at

his feet. He bent to retrieve it, smoothing it open reflexively.

It was the photograph of a group of young people, none much older than Eddie himself. He knew it had been taken at least twenty years ago, not because of the clothes they were wearing-which, like most Shadowhunter gear, were nondescript and black-but because he recognized his mother instantly: Sonia, no more than seventeen or eighteen, her hair halfway down her back and her face a little rounder, the chin and mouth less defined. *She looks like me*, Eddie thought dazedly.

Sonia's arm was around a boy Eddie didn't recognize. It gave him a jolt. He'd never thought of his mother being involved with anyone other than his father, since Sonia had never dated or seemed interested in romance. She wasn't like most single mothers, who trolled PTA meetings for likely-looking dads.

"That's Bob," said a voice at his elbow. " Pennywise, When he was seventeen."

Eddie leaped back, almost dropping the photo. Gard gave a startled and unhappy caw before settling back down on his perch, feathers ruffled.

It was Keene, looking at him with curious eyes. "I'm so sorry," Eddie said, setting the photograph down on the desk and backing hastily away. "I didn't mean to pry into your things."

"It's all right." Keene touched the photograph with a scarred and weathered hand-a strange contrast to the neat spotlessness of his tweed cuffs. "It's a piece of your past, after all."

Eddie drifted back toward the desk as if the photo exerted a magnetic pull. The white-haired boy in the photo was smiling at Sonia, his eyes crinkled in that way that boys' eyes crinkled when they really liked you. Nobody, Eddie thought, had ever looked at *him* that way. Pennywise, with his cold, fine-featured face, looked absolutely unlike his own father. "Pennywise looks ... sort of nice."

"Nice he wasn't," said Keene, with a twisted smile, "but he was charming and clever and very persuasive. Do you recognize anyone

else?"

Eddie looked again. Standing behind Pennywise, a little to the left, was a thin boy with a shock of light brown hair. He had the big shoulders and gawky wrists of someone who hadn't grown into his height yet. "Is that you?"

Keene nodded. "And... ?"

Eddie had to look twice before he identified someone else he knew: so young as to be nearly unrecognizable. In the end his glasses gave him away, and the eyes behind them, light blue as seawater. "Jim" he said.

"And here." Leaning over the photo, Keene indicated an elegant-looking teenage couple, both dark-haired, the girl half a head taller than the boy. Her features were narrow and predatory, almost cruel. "The Denbroughs," Keene said. "And there"-he indicated a very handsome boy with curling dark hair, high color in his square-jawed face-"is Wentworth Tozier."

"He doesn't look anything like Richie."

"Richie resembles his mother."

"Is this, like, a class photo?" Eddie asked.

"Not quite. This is a picture of the Circle, taken in the year it was formed. That's why Pennywise, the leader, is in the front, and Jim is on his right side-he was Pennywise's second in command."

Eddie turned his gaze away. "I still don't understand why my mother would join something like that."

"You must understand-"

"You keep saying that," Eddie said crossly. "I don't see why I must understand anything. You tell me the truth, and I'll either understand it or I won't."

The corner of Keene's mouth twitched. "As you say." He paused to reach out a hand and stroke Gard, who was strutting along the edge

of the desk importantly. "The Accords have never had the support of the whole Clave. The more venerable families, especially, cling to the old times, when Downworlders were for killing. Not just out of hatred but because it made them feel safer. It is easier to confront a threat as a mass, a group, not individuals who must be evaluated one by one... and most of us knew someone who had been injured or killed by a Downworlder. There is nothing," he added, "quite like the moral absolutism of the young. It's easy, as a child, to believe in good and evil, in light and dark. Pennywise never lost that- neither his destructive idealism nor his passionate loathing of anything he considered 'nonhuman.'"

"But he loved my mother," said Eddie.

"Yes," said Keene. "He loved your mother. And he loved Derry...."

"What was so great about Derry?" Eddie asked, hearing the grumpiness in his own voice.

"It was," Kene began, and corrected himself, "it *is*, home-for the Nephilim, where they can be their true selves, a place where there is no need for hiding or glamour. A place blessed by the Angel. It is more beautiful than you can imagine." There was raw pain in his voice.

Eddie thought suddenly of his dream. "Were there ever ... dances in the Glass City?"

Keene blinked at him as if waking up from a dream. "Every week. I never attended, but your mother did. And Pennywise" He chuckled softly. "I was more of a scholar. I spent my days in the library in Alicante, Derry's capital. The books you see here are only a fraction of the treasures it holds. I thought perhaps I might join the Brotherhood someday, but after what I did, of course, they would not have me."

"I'm sorry," Eddie said awkwardly. His mind was still full of the memory of his dream. *Was there a mermaid fountain where they danced? Did Pennywise wear white, so that my mother could see the Marks on his skin even through his shirt?*

"Can I keep this?" Eddie asked, indicating the photograph.

A flicker of hesitation passed over Keene's face. "I would prefer you not show it to Richie," he said. "He has enough to contend with, without photos of his dead father turning up."

"Of course." He hugged it to his chest. "Thank you."

"It's nothing." Keene looked at him quizzically. "Did you come to the library to see me, or for some other purpose?"

"I was wondering if you'd heard from the Clave. About the Cup. And-my mom."

"I got a short reply this morning."

Eddie could hear the eagerness in his own voice. "Have they sent people? Shadowhunters?"

Keene looked away from him. "Yes, they have."

"Why aren't they staying here?" Eddie asked.

"There is some concern that the Institute is being watched by Pennywise. The less he knows, the better." He saw Eddie's miserable expression, and sighed. "I'm sorry I can't tell you more, Edward. I am not much trusted by the Clave, even now. They told me very little. I wish I could help you."

There was something about the sadness in his voice that made Eddie reluctant to push him for more information. "You can," Eddie said. "I can't sleep. I keep thinking too much. Could you..."

"Ah, the unquiet mind." His voice was full of sympathy. "I can give you something for that. Wait here."

Eddie waited, looking at the picture again. It felt like a part of him now, being in this world. He remembered his conversation with Stan, Eddie was afraid that he had lost human Eddie forever.

But human Eddie was already gone a long time ago.

Notes for the Chapter:

i love stan/eddie friendship so I wrote a cute little scene with them <3333333

also #LosersClubHavingBreakfast, mike wasn't there though. do not worry, he'll show up ;)

14. Blood Calls to Blood

Notes for the Chapter:

Some Eddie/Ben bonding bc why not?

The potion Keene gave him smelled pleasantly of oranges and leaves. Eddie kept opening the vial and smelling it on his way back down the corridor. It was unfortunately still open when he entered his bedroom and found Richie sprawled out on the bed, looking at Eddie's sketchbook. With a little shriek of astonishment, Eddie dropped the vial; it bounced across the floor, spilling pale-green liquid onto the hardwood.

"Oh, crap," said Richie, sitting up, the sketchbook abandoned. "I hope that wasn't anything important."

"It was a sleeping potion," Eddie said angrily, toeing the vial with the tip of a sneaker. "And now it's gone."

"If only Stan were here. He could probably bore you to sleep."

Eddie was too tired to defend Stan. Instead he sat down on the bed, picking up the sketchbook. "I don't usually let people look at this."

"Why not?" Richie looked tousled, as if he'd been asleep himself. "You're a pretty good artist. Sometimes even excellent."

Eddie blushed, and cleared his throat. "It's like a diary to me. It's private."

Richie looked wounded. "A diary with no drawings of *me* in it?"

Eddie rolled his eyes, "Sometimes I forget how humble you are."

Richie looked down at his hands. They were like Keene's hands already, snowflaked with tiny white scars, though the skin was young and unlined. "If you're really tired, I could put you to sleep," he said. "Tell you a bedtime story."

Eddie frowned. "Really?"

"Yeah."

Eddie wondered if being tired had made them both a little crazy. But Richie didn't look tired. He looked almost sad. Eddie set the sketchbook down on the night table, and lay down, curling sideways on the pillow. "Okay."

"Close your eyes."

He closed them. Eddie could see the afterimage of lamplight reflected against his inner lids, like tiny starbursts.

"Once there was a boy," said Richie.

Eddie interrupted immediately. "A Shadowhunter boy?"

"Of course." For a moment a bleak amusement colored his voice. Then it was gone. "When the boy was six years old, his father gave him a falcon to train. Falcons are raptors-killing birds, his father told him, the Shadowhunters of the sky.

"The falcon didn't like the boy, and the boy didn't like it, either. Its sharp beak made him nervous, and its bright eyes always seemed to be watching him. It would slash at him with beak and talons when he came near: For weeks his wrists and hands were always bleeding. He didn't know it, but his father had selected a falcon that had lived in the wild for over a year, and thus was nearly impossible to tame. But the boy tried, because his father had told him to make the falcon obedient, and he wanted to please his father."

"Did this story actually happen?" Eddie asked.

"Let me finish it."

"Sorry."

"He began to see that the falcon was beautiful, that its slim wings were built for the speed of flight, that it was strong and swift, fierce and gentle. When it dived to the ground, it moved like light. When it learned to circle and come to his wrist, he nearly shouted with delight. Sometimes the bird would hop to his shoulder and put its beak in his hair. He knew his falcon loved him, and when he was

certain it was not just tamed but perfectly tamed, he went to his father and showed him what he had done, expecting him to be proud.

"Instead his father took the bird, now tame and trusting, in his hands and broke its neck. 'I told you to make it obedient,' his father said, and dropped the falcon's lifeless body to the ground. 'Instead, you taught it to love you. Falcons are not meant to be loving pets: They are fierce and wild, savage and cruel. This bird was not tamed; it was broken.'

"Later, when his father left him, the boy cried over his pet, until eventually his father sent a servant to take the body of the bird away and bury it."

Eddie, who had been lying still, hardly breathing, rolled onto his back and opened his eyes. "That's an awful story," he said indignantly.

Richie had his legs pulled up, his chin on his knees. "Is it?" he said ruminatively. "Ben's father was just trying to make him stronger. Inflexible."

"Ben?" Eddie asked, confused. Richie was now staring at him, realizing what he just said.

"I was making up a name for the boy."

"No, you weren't-" Eddie was too tired to keep talking. His mind racing with thoughts. *Could Ben's father had been that abusive?*

"Chee," Eddie tried to say. But sleep had him in its claws; it drew him down, and he was silent.

He was woken by an urgent voice. "Get up !"

Eddie opened his eyes slowly. They felt gluey, stuck together. He sat up quickly, and his head struck something hard.

"Ow! You hit me in the head!" It was a boy's voice. Ben. He flicked on the light next to the bed and regarded Eddie resentfully, rubbing at

his scalp. Ben seemed to shimmer in the lamplight-he was wearing a long grey shirt and black elegant pants. He looked, handsome, Eddie thought.

"Well, nobody told you to lean over me like that. You practically scared me to death." Eddie rubbed at his own head. There was a sore spot just above his eyebrow. "What do you want, anyway?"

Ben indicated the dark night sky outside. "It's almost midnight. We've got to leave for the party, and you're still not dressed."

"I was just going to wear this," Eddie said, indicating his jeans and T-shirt ensemble. "Is that a problem?"

"Is that a *problem*?" Ben looked like he might faint. "Of course it's a problem! No Downworlder would wear those clothes. And it's a party. You'll stick out like a sore thumb if you dress that...casually," he finished, looking as if the word he'd wanted to use was a lot worse than "casually."

"I didn't know we were dressing up," Eddie said sourly. "I don't have any party clothes with me."

"You'll just have to borrow mine."

"Oh no." Eddie thought of the too-big T-shirt and jeans. "I mean, I couldn't. Really."

Ben's smile was glittering as the light on the room. "I insist."

Eddie studied Ben for a second, he was happy. Eddie suddenly remembered the story Richie had told him, the boy and the falcon. Eddie couldn't imagine Ben as that boy, whose falcon had been murdered just because he was loving him.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" Ben asked, frowning. "Do I have a pimple on my face?"

"I'd really rather wear my own clothes," Eddie protested, squirming uncomfortably as Ben positioned him in front of the floor-length

mirror in his bedroom.

"Well, you can't," Ben said. "You look about eight years old, and worse, you look like a mundane."

"You dressed like that too!" Eddie said.

"Only when I'm lazy."

Eddie set his jaw rebelliously. "None of your clothes are going to fit me."

"We'll see about that."

Eddie watched Ben in the mirror as he rifled through his closet. Ben's room looked as if a disco ball had exploded inside it. The walls were black and shimmered with swirls of sponged-on golden paint. Clothes were strewn everywhere: on the rumpled black bed, hung over the backs of the wooden chairs, spilling out of the closet and the tall wardrobe propped against one wall.

"Nice room," Eddie said, thinking longingly of his own room at home. His *destroyed* home.

"Thanks. I painted it myself." Ben emerged from the closet, holding a black shirt and tossing it to Eddie. "The last time I used it, I was twelve, it probably will fit you."

Eddie took off his t-shirt and put on the shirt quickly.

"I've got some pants too," Ben said, now holding dark blue suit pants on his hands. "They're the smaller size I have."

"Thanks." Eddie said, he usually didn't like undressing in front of people. but now he didn't mind. He put on the pants. They looked nice, though it made Eddie look like a lawyer.

Ben whistled. "Damn, if I was gay, I'd totally-"

"Shut up," Eddie said, blushing. "I look like a penguin."

"You don't," Ben knelt and looked under his bed, he pulled out black

shoes. "Here, they should fit you." He handed them to Eddie.

Eddie flopped down on the bed and pulled the shoes on. They were a little loose around the calves, but didn't slide around on his feet.

He saw Ben putting on some perfume. "Do you want it? I got it from Rome."

"Rome?"

"Yeah, my parents got it from me when they went for a meeting."

"The Denbroughs?" Eddie said.

Ben was frowning lightly. "Of course, who else?"

Eddie was staring at him, thinking if he should tell him about the story. But he decided it wasn't time yet. "Ben, can I ask you something?"

"Sure," said Ben putting on more cologne.

"Is Richie gay?" The question came out of nowhere, he just said the first thing that came to his mind.

Ben froze, the cologne falling to the floor, thankfully it wasn't made of glass, so the bottle didn't break.

"Are you-" Eddie said.

"Why do you ask? Are you *into* him or something?"

Eddie could feel his face burning. "I'm just curious."

Ben sighed. "Well, I haven't asked him. He's been with a lot of girls, but also a lot of guys."

"So, he's bisexual."

"I guess."

Eddie stared at the mirror. "I guess Bill is gay, then."

"Is he that obvious?"

Eddie chuckled. "I have something called a *gaydar*."

Ben frowned. "A gayd— Forget it — you can't tell anyone."

"All right." Eddie heard the stiffness in his own voice. "I guess I didn't realize it was such a big deal."

"It would be to my parents," said Ben quietly. "They would disown them and throw them out of the Clave—"

"What, you can't be gay and a Shadowhunter?"

"There's no official rule about it. But people don't like it. I mean, less with people our age—I think," Ben added, uncertainly, and Eddie remembered how few other people his age Ben had ever really met. "But the older generation, no. If it happens, you don't talk about it."

"Oh," said Eddie, wishing he'd never mentioned it.

"I love my brothers," said Ben. "I'd do anything for them. But there's nothing I can do."

"At least they have you." Eddie said awkwardly.

"Richie told you about my story, didn't he?" Ben looked down.

"I — how did you—"

"I could tell by your face, trying to tell me something you know it would hurt me."

"Ben—"

"It's fine, I ruined the falcon. It wanted to be fed, it wouldn't hunt." Ben sat on the bed, avoiding Eddie's eyes."

"But he broke your falcon's neck, he must've known it would hurt you."

"We're not mundanes, Eddie." Ben got up from the bed. "You need to know that by now."

"Yes, but—"

"He had a lesson to teach me, that's how it's done."

Eddie inhaled deeply. "Maybe I'm just jealous. I never knew my father."

Ben sighed. "I know."

"I'm sorry, Ben."

"Me too, about your parents."

"It looks like we all have problems with our parents."

Ben nodded. "Especially Richie, he was only six—"

"You were six too."

"But it's different, Richie is different."

"Why do you think he's... Like that?" Eddie asked.

"He's had a rough past. We all had. Richie just handles it differently, trying to push people away so they don't see that he's hurt." Ben sighed. "Why do you think he dislikes Stan so much?"

"Uh, I thought it was because he's human."

"It's because he's *jealous* of him."

Eddie blinked, perplexed. "Jealous of *Stan*? Why—"

"He sees the both of you, laughing, being friends, he sees the normal life that he never could and never *will* have."

"How do you know all of this?"

Ben just waved his hand in the air. "It's easy to read people."

"If he wants a happy life, why doesn't he just *ask* for it?"

"That's something only Richie can answer."

Eddie touched his hair. "Do you think my hair too simple?"

Ben laughed. "Honestly, yes. But that's what makes you...*you*." He looked at the watch in his left hand. "Let's go."

"I need to stop by my room and grab something," Eddie said, standing up. "Also—do I need any weapons? Do you?"

"I've got plenty," Ben smirked and touched the pockets of his pants. "One is electrum, which is poisonous to demons, and the right one is blessed iron, in case I run across any unfriendly vampires or even faeries—faeries hate iron."

"Wow, you're prepared for everything."

Ben laughed out loud. "You'd be surprised."

The others were waiting for them in the entryway. They were wearing black, even Stan in a slightly too-big pair of black pants and his own shirt turned inside out to hide the band logo. Beverly was using a short black dress with a dark blue jacket, she was standing uncomfortably to the side while Richie and Bill slouched together against the wall, looking bored.

"Wow, Bev," Eddie said, surprised to see her dressed like that.

She smiled. "It's a dress, Eddie. I know I don't wear them that much, but *really*."

"You look—"

"Beautiful." Ben said, he was watching Beverly, but with a totally different expression.

Beverly frowned lightly. "Uh, thanks. You too, I guess."

Richie took something out of his jacket and handed it to Eddie. It was a long thin dagger in a leather sheath. The hilt of the dagger was set with a single red stone carved in the shape of a rose.

Eddie shook his head. "I wouldn't even know how to use that—"

He pressed it into Eddie's hand, curling his fingers around it. "You'd learn." Richie dropped his voice. "It's in your blood."

Eddie drew his hand back slowly. "All right." He slid the dagger into the outside pocket on his backpack.

He looked up from closing it to find Richie watching him through hooded eyes. "And one last thing," he said. He reached over and ruffled Eddie's hair.

"Much better." Richie said, and Eddie could almost notice a little blush in Richie's cheeks.

15. Eleven

Notes for the Chapter:

Eleven is here 7u7

The directions on the invitation took them to a largely industrial neighborhood in Brooklyn whose streets were lined with factories and warehouses. Some, Eddie could see, had been converted into lofts and galleries, but there was still something forbidding about their looming square shapes, boasting only a few windows covered in iron grilles.

"Keep up," said an irritable voice in his ear. It was Richie, who had dropped back to walk beside Eddie. "I don't want to have to keep looking behind me to make sure nothing's happened to you."

"So don't bother."

"Last time I left you alone, a demon attacked you," he pointed out.

"Well, I'd certainly hate to interrupt your pleasant night stroll with my sudden death."

Richie blinked. "There is a fine line between sarcasm and outright hostility, and you seem to have crossed it. What's up?"

Eddie bit his lip. "This morning, weird creepy guys dug around in my brain. Now I'm going to meet the weird creepy girl who originally dug around in my brain. What if I don't like what she finds?"

"Wouldn't you rather know the truth?"

"No. I mean, maybe. I don't know." Eddie sighed. "Would you?"

"This is the right street!" called Ben, a quarter of a block ahead. Stan, Beverly and Bill were with him. They were on a narrow avenue lined with old warehouses, though most now bore the signs of human residence: window boxes filled with flowers, lace curtains blowing in the clammy night breeze, numbered plastic trash cans stacked on the sidewalk. Eddie squinted hard, but there was no way to tell if this

was the street he'd seen at the Bone City—in his vision it had been nearly obliterated with snow.

"Always," Richie murmured.

Eddie looked sideways at him, not understanding. "What?"

"The truth," Richie said. "I would—"

"Richie" It was Bill. He was standing on the pavement, not far away; Eddie wondered why his voice had sounded so loud.

Richie turned, his hand falling away from Eddie's shoulder. "Yes?"

"Think w-w're in the right place?" Bill was pointing at something Eddie couldn't see; it was hidden behind the bulk of a large black car.

"What's that?" Richie joined Bill; Eddie heard him laugh. Coming around the car, he saw what they were looking at: several motorcycles, sleek and silvery, with low-slung black chassis. Oily-looking tubes and pipes slithered up and around them, ropy as veins. There was a queasy sense of something organic about the bikes, like the bio-creatures in a Giger painting.

"Vampires," Richie said.

"They look like motorcycles to me," said Stan joining them with Beverly and Ben at his side. Ben frowned at the bikes.

"They are, but they've been altered to run on demon energies," Ben explained. "Vampires use them—it lets them get around fast at night. It's not strictly Covenant, but ..."

"I've heard some of the bikes can f-fly," said Bill eagerly. He sounded like Stan with a new video game. "Or go i-invisible at the flick of a switch. Or operate u-underwater."

Richie had jumped down off the curb and was circling the bikes, examining them. He reached out a hand and stroked one of the bikes along the sleek chassis. It had words painted along the side, in silver: NOX INVICTUS. "Victorious night," he translated.

Bill was looking at him strangely. "What are you doing?"

Eddie thought he saw Richie slide his hand back inside his jacket. "Nothing."

"Well, hurry up," Beverly said. "I didn't get this dressed up to watch you mess around in the gutter with a bunch of motorcycles."

Richie was looking at Eddie. "This building," he said, pointing at the red brick warehouse. "Is this the one?"

Eddie exhaled. "I think so," he said uncertainly. "They all look the same."

"One way to find out," said Beverly, mounting the steps with a determined stride. The rest of them followed, crowding close to one another in the foul-smelling entryway. A naked bulb hung from a cord overhead, illuminating a large metal-bound door and a row of apartment buzzers along the left wall. Only one had a name written over it: ELEVEN.

Beverly pressed the buzzer. Nothing happened. She pressed it again. She was about to press it a third time when Bill caught her wrist. "Don't be rude," he said.

Richie glared at him. "Bill—"

The door flew open.

A tall girl standing in the doorway regarded them curiously. It was Beverly recovered herself first, flashing a brilliant smile. "Jane? Jane Ives?"

"Please call me Eleven." The girl said, her hair was black, short, as Beverly's. It reminded Eddie of Richie's hair. But didn't say anything. She wore a light blue dress and a pink headband. She looked like she was around there age. She looked at the others, "Shadowhunters," She said. "I don't remember inviting you."

Bev took out her invitation and waved it like a white flag. "I have an invitation. These"—she indicated the rest of the group with a grand wave of her arm—"are my friends."

Eleven was staring at Beverly's purple necklace hanging around her neck. Then smiled. "Well, you can come in. But try not to murder any of my guests."

Richie edged into the doorway, sizing up Eleven with his eyes. "Even if one of them spills a drink on my new shoes?"

"Even then." Eleven's hand shot out, so fast it was barely a blur. She plucked the stole out of Richie's hand—Eddie hadn't even realized he was holding it—and held it up. Richie looked faintly abashed. "As for this," Eleven said, sliding it into Richie's jeans pocket, "keep it in your pants, please."

"Come on," she said, waving the rest of them inside. "Before I change my mind."

They pushed past Richie, laughing nervously. Only Beverly stopped to shake her head. "Try not to piss her off, please. Then she won't help us."

Richie looked bored. "I know what I'm doing."

"I hope so." Beverly flounced past him in a swirl of skirts.

Eleven's apartment was at the top of a long flight of rickety stairs. Stan hurried to catch up with Eddie, who was regretting having put his hand on the banister to steady himself. It was sticky with something that glowed a faint and sickly green.

"Yech," said Stan, and offered him a corner of his T-shirt to wipe his hand on. Eddie did. "Is everything all right? You seem—distracted."

"She just looks so familiar. Eleven, I mean."

"Is she the one who sells you crack?"

"Very funny, Uris."

The loft was huge and almost totally empty of furniture. Floor-to-ceiling windows were smeared with a thick film of dirt and paint,

blocking out most of the ambient light from the street. Big metal pillars wound with colored lights held up an arched, sooty ceiling.

Doors torn off their hinges and laid across dented metal garbage cans made a makeshift bar at one end of the room. A lilac-skinned woman in a metallic bustier was ranging drinks along the bar in tall, harshly colored glasses that tinted the fluid inside them: blood red, cyanosis blue, poison green.

Even for a New York bartender she worked with an amazingly speedy efficiency—probably helped along by the fact that she had a second set of long, graceful arms to go with the first. Eddie was reminded of Jim's Indian goddess statue

"You like the party?"

Eddie turned to see Eleven lounging against one of the pillars. Her eyes shone in the darkness. Glancing around, Eddie saw that Richie and the others were gone, swallowed up by the crowd.

He tried to smile. "Is it in honor of anything?"

"My cat's birthday."

"Oh." Eddie glanced around. "Where's your cat?"

She unhitched herself from the pillar, looking solemn. "I don't know. He ran away."

Eddie was spared responding to this by the reappearance of Richie and Beverly. Beverly looked sullen as usual. Richie was wearing a strand of tiny glowing flowers around his neck and seemed pleased with himself. "Where are the others?" Eddie said.

"Dancing like maniacs." Beverly pointed. Eddie could just see them on the edge of the packed square of bodies. Ben moving around provocatively, to impress Beverly, maybe. Stan was bouncing on his feet. Bill was just hugging himself, slightly moving, he looked uncomfortable, as if someone had forced him to dance.

Eleven was seeing Beverly now. "Pretty necklace." She said.

Beverly touched it and smiled awkwardly, "Thanks—"

"We need to talk to you." Richie said.

Eleven stared at him. "Have we met before?"

"No." Richie said, frowning.

"You remind me of someone." Eleven had a thinking face. "That pretty face is unforgettable."

"Thank you," Richie said rolling his eyes. "We have something important to discuss."

Eleven raised an eyebrow. "Am I in trouble with the Clave?"

"No," Said Eddie.

"Maybe." Richie said at the same time. Eddie shot him a look. "No, you're not in trouble."

Eleven sighed. "Fine, we can talk in my room."

Eddie turned to Beverly. "You should stay here—"

"No," Eleven interrupted. "Let her come, I have a few things I need to discuss with her."

"Are there bathrooms in this place?" Ben asked, almost shouting because of the loud music.

"I think it's over there!" Stan pointed out a big purple door where a few people entered. Ben left the dance floor.

Stan stared at Bill, he had his eyes closed, even with all the loud music. He seemed calm, as if he was in the most quiet place in the world.

"Nice party, huh?" Stan said, covering one ear, because of the music.

Bill blinked and looked at him, really looked at him. As if he realized

Stan was a person.

"What?" He shouted, holding his ear.

Stan sighed. "I'm getting drinks, do you want anything?"

Bill shook his head. "I'll g-go with you."

They headed to a large table filled with cookies and seafood. The good art was that it was away from the music, so they could talk normally now.

"Do you think there are cupcakes here?" Stan asked looking around the table. "I'm starving."

Bill shrugged but didn't look at him. Stan had never met a quiet person in his life. He didn't know if Bill was shy or if he just wasn't a guy of words. Bill was just looking everywhere as if trying to find a distraction. Stan just looked at the table.

Turns out, there *were* cupcakes, chocolate flavor.

"You don't have to babysit me" Stan said, then he took a bite of the cupcake. It was delicious.

"It's not l-like I have a c-choice." Bill was now looking at the cupcake in his hand. "If I leave you f-for five seconds, you will probably g-get lost."

"I'm not a child." Stan said with his mouth full.

Bill raised an eyebrow. "R-really? I had to look t-twice to realize you w-weren't."

Stan chuckled. "Fair play. Isn't there a *rune* for your stutter?"

Bill frowned. "You're not funny."

"I wasn't trying to—"

"Runes don't w-work on natural d-disabilities." Bill grabbed a cupcake and smelled it then wrinkled his nose. "Ugh, I h-hate chocolate."

Stan almost dropped the cupcake in his hand. "You *what*? Do not talk to me!"

"Oh," Bill lowered his gaze. "S-sorry."

Stan raised his eyebrows and laughed. "I'm just joking, *dude*! Gosh, you take everything so seriously."

Bill almost smiled, "Yeah, I knew t-that."

Stan rolled his eyes, not believing him. "Why don't you like chocolate? It's the best thing in the world."

Bill shrugged. "I just d-don't like it,"

"You're missing on so much."

Bill handed him his cupcake. "You can t-take mine."

Stan grabbed Bill's cupcake and ate it immediately, he was so hungry.

Bill blinked, Stan realized his eyelashes were long. Like Beverly's, but on Bill it looked different.

"What is Ben doing?" It's been ten minutes." Stan said looking for Ben.

Bill chuckled. "H-He probably got stuck."

Stan laughed out loud. "Oh, damn. Stuttering Bill makes his move."

"S-shut up." Bill was also watching all the people in the house, hoping to see Ben's figure around. But he wasn't.

"So," Stan said wanting to find a subject for conversation. "I know I smell like detergent but it's not that bad. You don't have to avoid me."

"I'm not," Bill said. "I j-just feel weird around you."

Stan raised an eyebrow. "*Weird*? You mean—"

Bill shook his head. "No!" Stan could see he was blushing. "Around a m-mundane."

"Well, we're not some strange species." Stan ate another cupcake. "Aren't you supposed to be protecting me?"

"You don't n-need protection, you could scare off a-anyone with your cologne." And then Bill laughed.

Stan gasped dramatically. "Excuse you!"

Ben suddenly appeared. "What did I miss?"

Stan shrugged. "Just Bill saying mean stuff to you."

"I wasn't!" Bill said.

"Anyway, I wanna go to the bathroom." Stan said, before leaving Bill and Ben behind.

Ben looked at Bill. "So, you and Stan—"

"Don't start."

Eleven's bedroom was a riot of color: canary-yellow sheets and bedspread draped over a mattress on the floor, electric-blue vanity table strewn with more pots of paint and makeup than Beverly's. Rainbow velvet curtains hid the floor-to-ceiling windows, and a tangled wool rug covered the floor.

"Nice place," said Richie, drawing aside a heavy swag of curtain. "Guess it pays well, being the High Witch of Brooklyn?"

Eleven shrugged. "I guess." She closed the door behind her. "So," she said. "Why did you want to talk to me?"

"It's not them, actually," Eddie said, finding his voice before Richie could reply. "I'm the one who wanted to talk to you."

Eleven turned her inhuman eyes on him. "You are not one of them," she said. "Not of the Clave. But you can see the Invisible World."

"My mother was one of the Clave," Eddie said. It was the first time he

had said it out loud and known it to be true. "But she never told me. She kept it a secret. I don't know why."

"Then ask her."

"I can't. She's ..." Eddie hesitated. "She's gone."

"And your father?"

"He died before I was born."

Eleven exhaled irritably. "As Oscar Wilde once said, 'To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To lose both seems like carelessness.'"

Eddie heard Beverly make a small hissing sound, like air being sucked through her teeth. He said, "I didn't lose my mother. She was taken from me. By Pennywise."

"I don't know any Pennywise" said Eleven, her eyes flickered and Eddie knew she was lying. "I'm sorry for your tragic circumstances, but I fail to see what any of this has to do with me. If you could tell me—"

"He can't tell you, because he doesn't remember," Richie said sharply. "Someone erased his memories. So we went to the Silent City to see what the Brothers could pull out of his head. They got two words. I think you can guess what they were."

There was a short silence.

"You gave me that necklace didn't you?" Beverly pointed to a little table in the room, filled with necklaces of different colors.

"Yeah. I didn't know which color was your favorite so I picked purple because it's the color of—"

"Can we get back to Eddie please?" Richie rolled his eyes.

"Oh yes. I signed it—"

"You *signed* my mind?" Eddie said in disbelief.

Eleven raised her hand, tracing the fiery outlines of letters against the air. When she dropped her hand, they hung there, hot and golden, making the painted lines of his eyes and mouth burn with reflected light. JANE IVES.

"I was proud of my work on you," she said slowly, looking at Eddie. "So clean. So perfect. What you saw you would forget, even as you saw it. No image of pixie or goblin or long-legged beastie would remain to trouble your blameless mortal sleep. I used those necklaces to increase the power of the spell. That's the way she wanted it."

"Who wanted it?" Eddie asked.

"Your mother."

Eddie felt the words like a blow against his heart.

"My *mother* did this to me?" Eddie demanded, but his surprise outrage didn't sound convincing, even to his own ears. "Why?"

"And why would you give *her* a magical necklace? She's a mundane." Richie said frowning, pointing to Beverly.

Eleven laughed. "Oh, I do not know why Sonia asked for my help, but I do know that Beverly Marsh is not a mundane."

Beverly was confused. "What— How—"

Eddie said, "But she is."

"Oh," said Richie. "I think I get it now."

"Get what?" Eddie said, Beverly also looked confused.

Eleven signed. "Your dad asked me to give you that necklace when the time was right. So your powers can be controlled."

"My *powers*?" Beverly frowned.

"Okay," Richie said. "I'm tired of this drama." He turned to Beverly. "You're a witch, Beverly."

Notes for the Chapter:

So Bev is a witch : "v damn

16. A Problem Of Memory

"Do you guys want any tea?" Eleven said. "Maybe some Eggo's? I love them."

Beverly was speechless, as if someone had slapped her in the face. "I'm a..."

"Witch?" Eddie finished the sentence, "You're lying—"

"Am I?" Eleven looked at Beverly. "How did you kill that demon at your house?"

"I...threw the necklace..."

"The necklace has a special power." Eleven said, grabbing Beverly's necklace. "Only witches can use it."

"So *that's* why it burned me." Richie was almost smiling.

"But," Beverly said. "My dad—"

"Was a demon."

Beverly was almost crying. "But, he couldn't. He is—"

"Oh, honey. I don't think you understand. Alvin is your mother's husband. But he's not your father."

Eddie was frowning. "What? But—"

"Everything was so traumatic for your mother, she came to me, pregnant. And asked me to put a memory spell on her. If you ask her now, it would be pointless." Eleven said to Beverly. "Alvin was a mundane, bit but he was aware of everything, he asked me to give you the necklace so you wouldn't get hurt, then I put the spell on him too."

Bev was shaking her head. "Why would they do that? Then my real father—"

"A shapeshifter is the best option," Richie said, looking at Beverly with pity.

Eddie was looking at his best friend, he realized the both of them were in the same place, both of their parents had secrets. Deadly secrets.

"What about *my* mother?" Eddie asked. "Was there something specific she wanted me to forget? Do you know what it was?"

Eleven paced restlessly to the window. "The first time I ever saw you, you must have been about two years old. I was watching out this window"-she tapped the glass, freeing a shower of dust and paint chips- "and I saw her hurrying up the street, holding something wrapped in a blanket. I was surprised when she stopped at my door. She looked so ordinary, so young."

"She unwrapped the blanket when she came in my door. You were inside it. She set you down on the floor and you started ranging around, picking things up, pulling my cat's tail-you screamed like a banshee when the cat scratched you." Eleven paused. They were all watching her intently now, even Richie. "She told me she was a Shadowhunter. There was no point in her lying about it; Covenant Marks show up, even when they've faded with time, like faint silver scars against the skin. They flickered when she moved." Eleven rubbed at the glitter makeup around her eyes. "She told me she'd hoped you'd been born with a blind Inner Eye-some Shadowhunters have to be taught to see the Shadow World. But she'd caught you that afternoon, teasing a pixie trapped in a hedge. She knew you could see. So she asked me if it was possible to blind you of the Sight."

Eddie made a little noise, a pained exhalation of breath, but Eleven went on remorselessly.

"I told her that crippling that part of your mind might leave you damaged, possibly insane. She didn't cry. She wasn't the sort of woman who weeps easily, your mother. She asked me if there was another way, and I told her you could be made to forget those parts of the Shadow World that you could see, even as you saw them. The only caveat was that she'd have to come to me every two years as the results of the spell began to fade."

"And did she?" asked Eddie.

Eleven nodded. "I've seen you every two years since that first time-I've watched you grow up. You're the only child I have ever watched grow up that way, you know. In my business one isn't generally that welcome around human children."

"So you recognized Eddie when we walked in," Richie said. "And Beverly."

"Of course I did." Eleven sounded exasperated. "And it was a shock, too. But what would you have done? Eddie didn't know me. He wasn't supposed to know me. Just the fact that he was here meant the spell had started to fade-and in fact, we were due for another visit about a month ago. I even came by your house when I got back from Tanzania, but Sonia said that you two had had a fight and you'd run off. She said she'd call on me when you came back, but"-an elegant shrug-"she never did."

A cold wash of memory prickled Eddie's skin. He remembered standing in the foyer next to Stan and Beverly, straining to remember something that danced just at the edge of his vision ...

"You were there, that day," Eddie said. "I saw you coming out of Dorothea's apartment. I remember your eyes."

"You shouldn't remember me," Eleven said. "I threw up a glamour as hard as a wall as soon as I saw you. You should have run right into it face-first—psychically speaking."

If you run into a psychic wall face-first, do you wind up with psychic bruises? Eddie said, "If you take the spell off me, will I be able to remember all the things I've forgotten? All the memories you stole?"

"I can't take it off you." Eleven looked uncomfortable.

"What?" Richie sounded furious. "Why not? The Clave requires you —"

"I don't care what the Clave says."

"Don't you know how to reverse it?" Beverly asked. "The spell, I

mean."

Eleven sighed. "Undoing a spell is a great deal more difficult than creating it in the first place. The intricacy of this one, the care I put into weaving it—if I made even the smallest mistake in unraveling it, his mind could be damaged forever. Besides," she added, "it's already begun to fade. The effects will vanish over time on their own."

"What about my parents?" Beverly said softly, Eddie could see her eyes tearing up.

"I'm sorry, but memory spells only vanish if they're used in Shadowhunters, with humans is irreversible."

Bev didn't reply.

"Will I get all my memories back then?" Eddie asked. "Whatever was taken out of my head?"

"I don't know. They might come back all at once, or in stages."

"I don't want to wait." Eddie folded his hands tightly in his lap, his fingers clamped together so hard that the tips turned white. "All my life I've felt like there was something wrong with me. Something missing or damaged. Now I know—"

"I didn't damage you." It was Eleven's turn to interrupt, her lips curled back angrily to show sharp white teeth. "Every teenager in the world feels like that, feels broken or out of place, different somehow, royalty mistakenly born into a family of peasants. The difference in your case is that it's true. You are different. Maybe not better—but different. And it's no picnic being different. Trust me, I know how you feel."

Eddie closed his eyes. "But I don't—"

"Different isn't better, Edward. Your mother was trying to protect you. Don't throw it back in her face."

Eddie's hands relaxed their grip on each other. "I don't care if I'm different," he said. "I just want to be who I really am."

Eleven swore, in a language Eddie didn't know. It sounded like crackling flames. "All right. Listen. I can't undo what I've done, but I can give you something else. A piece of what would have been yours if you'd been raised a true child of the Nephilim." She stalked across the room to the bookcase and dragged down a heavy volume bound in rotting green velvet. She flipped through the pages, shedding dust and bits of blackened cloth. The pages were thin, almost translucent eggshell parchment, each marked with a stark black rune.

Richie's eyebrows went up. "Is that a copy of the Gray Book?"

"It's not gray," Beverly said, out of her shock. "It's green."

"If there was such a thing as terminal literalism, you'd have died in childhood," said Richie, brushing dust off the windowsill and eyeing it as if considering whether it was clean enough to sit on. "Gray is short for 'Gramarye.' It means 'magic, hidden wisdom.' In it is copied every rune the Angel Raziel wrote in the original Book of the Covenant. There aren't many copies because each one has to be specially made. Some of the runes are so powerful they'd burn through regular pages."

"I didn't know that." Beverly said, rolling her eyes.

Eleven hooked her finger between two pages of the book and came over to Eddie, setting it carefully in his lap. "Now, when I open the book, I want you to study the page. Look at it until you feel something change inside your mind."

"Will it hurt?" Eddie asked nervously.

"All knowledge hurts," she replied, and stood up, letting the book fall open in his lap. Eddie stared down at the clean white page with the black rune Mark spilled across it. It looked something like a winged spiral, until he tilted his head, and then it seemed like a staff wound around with vines. The mutable corners of the pattern tickled his mind like feathers brushed against sensitive skin. He felt the shivery flicker of reaction, making him want to close his eyes, but he held them open until they stung and blurred. He was about to blink when he felt it: a click inside his head, like a key turning in a lock.

The rune on the page seemed to spring into sharp focus, and he thought, involuntarily, *Remember*. If the rune were a word, it would have been that one, but there was more meaning to it than any word he could imagine. It was a child's first memory of light falling through crib bars, the recollected scent of rain and city streets, the pain of unforgotten loss, the sting of remembered humiliation, and the cruel forgetfulness of old age, when the most ancient of memories stand out with agonizingly clear precision and the nearest of incidents are lost beyond recall.

With a little sigh he turned to the next page, and the next, letting the images and sensations flow over him. *Sorrow. Thought. Strength. Protection. Grace*—and then cried out in reproachful surprise as Eleven snatched the book off his lap.

"That's enough," she said, sliding it back onto its shelf. She dusted her hands off on her dress, leaving streaks of gray. "If you read all the runes at once, you'll give yourself a headache."

"But—"

"Most Shadowhunter children grow up learning one rune at a time over a period of years," said Richie. "The Gray Book contains runes even I don't know."

"Imagine that," said Eleven.

Richie ignored her. "Eleven showed you the rune for understanding and remembrance. It opens your mind up to reading and recognizing the rest of the Marks."

It also may serve as a trigger to activate dormant memory." Said Eleven. "They could return to you more quickly than they would otherwise. It's the best I can do."

Eddie looked down at his lap. "I still don't remember anything about the Mortal Cup."

"Is *that* what this is about?" Eleven sounded actually astonished. "You're after the Angel's Cup? Look, I've been through your memories. There was nothing in them about the Mortal Instruments."

"Mortal Instruments?" Beverly echoed, bewildered.

"The Angel gave three items to the first Shadowhunters. A cup, a sword, and a mirror. The Silent Brothers have the Sword; the Cup and the Mirror were in Idris, at least until Pennywise came along." Eleven explained.

"Nobody knows where the Mirror is," said Richie. "Nobody's known for ages," He exhaled. "But it's the Cup that concerns us, Pennywise's looking for it."

"And you want to get to it before he does?" Eleven asked, her eyebrows winging upward.

"I thought you said you didn't know who Pennywise was?" Eddie pointed out.

"I lied," Eleven admitted candidly. "I'm not one of the fey, you know. I'm not required to be truthful. And only a fool would get between Pennywise and his revenge."

"Is that what you think he's after? Revenge?" said Eddie.

"I would guess so. He suffered a grave defeat, and he hardly seemed—seems—the type of man to suffer defeat gracefully."

Richie looked harder at Eleven. "Were you at the Uprising?"

"I was. I killed a number of your folk."

"Circle members," said Richie quickly. "Not ours—"

"Whatever."

"So, will you help us find the Cup?" Eddie said.

"I wouldn't if I could," said Eleven, "which, by the way, I can't. I've no idea where it is, and I don't care to know. Only a fool, as I said."

Richie sat up straighter. "But without the Cup, we can't—"

"Make more of you. I know," said Eleven "Perhaps not everyone

regards that as quite the disaster that you do.

Eddie came over to Beverly. "Are you okay?"

Beverly shrugged. "What do you think?"

Eleven, standing by the door, snapped her fingers impatiently. "Come on, before my cat comes back and kills you.

They got out, Eleven trailing behind them as she paused to lock the bedroom door. The tenor of the party seemed subtly different to Eddie. Perhaps it was just his slightly altered vision: Everything seemed clearer, crystalline edges sharply defined. He watched a group of musicians take the small stage at the center of the room. They wore flowing garments in deep colors of gold, purple, and green, and their high voices were sharp and ethereal.

"I hate faerie bands," Eleven muttered as the musicians segued into another haunting song, the melody as delicate and translucent as rock crystal. "All they ever play is mopey ballads."

Beverly was glancing around the room. "Where's Stan?"

A rush of guilty concern hit Eddie. He'd forgotten about Stan. He spun around, looking for the familiar skinny shoulders and shock of dark hair. "I don't see him. Them, I mean."

Eddie saw a brown-skinned boy sitting on one of the chairs beside the big table, he looked bored. Maybe he saw Stan.

"Hey," Eddie touched the boy's shoulder.

"Yeah?" The boy looked at him in curiosity.

"¿Have you seen a boy, brown hair, black shirt. Not so tall—"

"Smells like detergent." Richie added, while listening to the conversation.

Eddie rolled his eyes. Then looked at the boy. "Have you seen him?"

The boy shrugged. "I think I saw him leave with some guys in dark

clothes."

"Thanks." Eddie said, and got away from the boy. He saw Ben and Bill appearing with worried looks on their face.

Ben looked green. "Where have you been? I've been looking all over ___"

"Where's Stan?" Beverly interrupted.

Bill wobbled. "He's g-gone," she said darkly.

"What do you mean *gone*?" Eddie said, his heart beating fast.

"He went to the bathroom," Ben said. "We went looking for him, and we saw him passed out, then some guys took him."

"What?" Eddie asked incredulously. "You don't mean—"

"Probably vampires," Richie said. "They use dark clothes."

"Stan was kidnapped by *vampires*?" Beverly sounded angry. "And you didn't save him?"

Bill looked taken aback. "W-we tried but the vampires were strong—"

"So you *left* him there?" Eddie was now more angry than scared.

Ben raised his hand to touch Eddie in the shoulder. "Eddie we're sor ___"

Eddie didn't know he'd punched Ben until he saw Ben's body on the floor, touching his bleeding nose. He took Beverly's hand and dragged her to the stairs. He could hear Richie saying his name but Eddie didn't care.

Stan was the only thing that mattered in that moment.

Notes for the Chapter:

Mike Hanlon finally appeared!!!

17. Believer

Notes for the Chapter:

It feels like I haven't updated since forever lmao

"Eddie wait!" Beverly grabbed his arm before they could exit the building. "Do you think leaving like that was *right*?"

"What did you want me to do? Stan could be dying right now," Sweat was running through Eddie's forehead. "We need to find him."

"But we don't know where he is! We should ask *them*."

"The redhead is right." Eddie heard a deep voice behind him, Richie was standing there, Ben and Bill at his side, Ben's nose was back to normal, but he had an angry look on his face.

Eleven was with them as well, checking her watch on her wrist as if she didn't want to be here. "So, why was I called here?"

"It's Stan," Beverly said. "He's missing."

"Ah," said Eleven, delicately, "missing what, exactly?"

"Missing," Richie repeated, "as in gone, absent, notable for his lack of presence, disappeared."

"We saw v-vampires taking him." Bill said, avoiding to look at anyone. "Have you seen any of t-them?"

Eleven dropped her hand with a sigh. "I saw one of the vampire bike kids from the uptown lair leave with an asleep boy in his arms. Honestly, I figured it was one of their own. Sometimes the Night Children pass out when they get drunk."

"But you were with us when that happened." Eddie said.

"I have eyes everywhere."

"There's one more thing." Richie spoke calmly enough, but he was on

alert now, the way he had been in the apartment before they'd found the Forsaken. "Where's their lair?"

"Their what?"

"The vampires' lair. That's where they went, isn't it?"

"I would imagine so." Eleven looked as if she'd rather be anywhere else.

"I need you to tell me where it is."

Eleven shook her head. "I'm not setting myself on the bad side of the Night Children for a mundane I don't even know."

"Wait," Eddie interrupted. "What would they want with Stan? I thought they weren't allowed to hurt people..."

"My guess?" said Eleven, not unkindly. "They thought it would be funny to kidnap a Shadowhunter's friend. They don't like you much, whatever the Accords might say-and there's nothing in the Covenant about kidnapping people. But they're rebel vampires, so they may kill him."

"Then you have to help us," Beverly said to the warlock. "Otherwise Stan will die."

Eleven looked her up and down with a sort of clinical sympathy. "They all die, dear," she said. "You might as well get used to it."

"You still haven't told us where the lair is," Richie said.

"And I'm not going to. I told you-"

It was Eddie who cut her off, pushing himself in front of Richie. "You messed with my brain," he said. "Took my memories. Can't you do this one thing for me?"

Eleven narrowed her gleaming cat's eyes. Slowly the witch lowered her head and struck it once, none too gently, against the wall. "The old Hotel Dumont," she said. "Uptown."

"I know where that is." Ben looked pleased.

"We need to get there right away. Do you have a Portal?" Eddie demanded, addressing Eleven.

"No." She looked annoyed. "Portals are quite difficult to construct and pose no small risk to their owner. Nasty things can come through them if they're not warded properly. The only ones I know of in New York are the one at Dorothea's and the one at Renwick's, but they're both too far away to be worth the bother of trying to get there, even if you were sure their owners would let you use them, which they probably wouldn't. Got that? Now go away." Eleven stared at all of them. But no one moved.

"One more thing," Richie said. "Is there a holy place around here?"

"Good idea. If you're going to take on a lair of vampires by yourself, you'd better pray first."

"We need weapons," Richie said tersely. "More than what we've got on us."

Eleven pointed. "There's a Catholic church down on Diamond Street. Will that do?"

"Yeah, thank—"

"Now leave." Eleven raised her hand and all of them appeared outside the building.

"Rude." Beverly said.

"Come on, we have to go." Richie said, starting to walk, everyone followed them. Eddie felt a cold hand on his shoulder, he turned around and saw Eleven.

"I have a message for you," she said quietly. "From your mother."

Eddie was so surprised he nearly dropped the pack. "From my mother? You mean, she asked you to tell me something?"

"Not exactly," Eleven said. Her feline eyes, slit by their single vertical

pupils like fissures in a green-gold wall, were serious for once. “But I knew her in a way that you didn’t. She did what she did to keep you out of a world that she hated. Her whole existence, the running, the hiding—the lies, as you called them—were to keep you safe. Don’t waste her sacrifices by risking your life. She wouldn’t want that.”

"She wouldn't want me to save her?"

“Not if it meant putting yourself in danger.”

“But I’m the only person who cares what happens to her—”

“No,” Eleven said. “You aren’t.”

Eddie blinked. “I don’t understand. Is there—Eleven, if you know something—”

She cut him off with brutal precision. “And one last thing.” Her eyes flicked toward the road, where Richie, Ben, Bill and Bev were walking. “Keep in mind that when your mother fled from the Shadow World, it wasn’t the monsters she was hiding from. Not the warlocks, the wolf-men, the Fair Folk, not even the demons themselves. It was *them*. It was the Shadowhunters.”

At night, the Diamond Street Church looked spectral, its Gothic arched windows reflecting the moonlight like silvery mirrors. A wrought-iron fence surrounded the building and was painted a matte black. Eddie rattled the front gate, but a sturdy padlock held it closed. “It’s locked,” he said, glancing at Richie over his shoulder.

He brandished his stele. “Let me at it.”

Eddie watched him as he worked at the lock, watched the lean curve of his back, the swell of muscles under the short sleeves of his shirt.

The padlock hit the ground with a clang, a twisted lump of metal. Richie looked pleased with himself. “As usual,” he said, “I’m amazingly good at that.”

Eddie felt suddenly annoyed. “When the self-congratulatory part of the evening is over, maybe we could get back to saving my best

friend from being exsanguinated to death?"

"Exsanguinated," said Richie, impressed. "That's a big word."

"And you're a big—"

"Tsk ts," he interrupted. "No swearing in church."

"We're not in the church yet." Beverly said who was trembling because of the cold.

"Do you want my jacket?" Ben asked, almost taking it off.

"No, thank you." Beverly crossed her arms around her chest.

Richie frowned and looked at them. "I think it's best if you guys go back to the Institute."

"W-why?" Bill asked.

"I don't know, it would be suspicious if all of us are together." Richie said. "They're probably gonna attack us."

Ben rolled his eyes. "If you find Stan dead, tell him it was a pleasure to meet him." He said before leaving, Bill just stared at Richie and shook his head, before following Ben.

"You too, little witch." Richie stopped her before Beverly could enter the Church.

"I'm not going anywhere." She said, challenging Richie with her eyes.

"If the vampires see a witch with us, they're most likely gonna kill Stan. Go."

Beverly looked at Eddie, who shrugged. "Well be fine. I'll save Stan. Don't worry."

Bev sighed. "If Eddie or Stan get hurt I'll personally kick you in the b
—"

"Fine, I get it!" Richie said, genuinely surprised. "I didn't know girls used that vocabulary."

Beverly hugged Eddie and elbowed Richie in the stomach before joining Bill and Ben on the sidewalk.

"She really *is* something. Isn't she?" Richie asked Eddie.

"You have no idea," Eddie watched Beverly as they went farther away.

Richie placed a thin brown hand, marked all over with delicate white scars like a veiling of lace, against the wood of the door, just above the latch. "In the name of the Clave," he said, "I ask entry to this holy place. In the name of the Battle That Never Ends, I ask the use of your weapons. And in the name of the Angel Raziel, I ask your blessings on my mission against the darkness."

Eddie stared at him. Richie didn't move, though the night wind blew his hair into his eyes; he blinked, and just as Eddie was about to speak, the door opened with a click and a creak of hinges. It swung inward smoothly before them, opening onto a cool dark empty space, lit by points of fire.

Richie stepped back. "After you."

When Eddie stepped inside, a wave of cool air enveloped him, along with the smell of stone and candle wax. Dim rows of pews stretched toward the altar, and a bank of candles glowed like a bed of sparks against the far wall. He realized that, apart from the Institute, which didn't really count, he'd never actually been inside a church before. He'd seen pictures, and seen the insides of churches in movies and in anime shows, where they turned up regularly. A scene in one of his favorite anime series took place in a church with a monstrous vampire priest. You were supposed to feel safe inside a church, but he didn't. Strange shapes seemed to loom up at him out of the shadows. He shivered.

"The stone walls keep out the heat," said Richie, noticing.

"It's not that," Eddie said. "You know, I've never been in a church before."

"You've been in the Institute."

"I mean in a real church. For services. That sort of thing."

Richie knelt down in front of the altar, and Eddie thought for a moment that he was praying. The altar itself was high, made of a dark granite, and draped with a red cloth. Behind it loomed an ornate gold screen, etched with the figures of saints and martyrs, each with a flat gold disk behind his head representing a halo.

"Richie," he whispered. "What are you doing?"

Richie had placed his hands on the stone floor and was moving them back and forth rapidly, as if searching for something, his fingertips stirring up dust. "Looking for weapons."

"Here?"

"They'd be hidden, usually around the altar. Kept for our use in case of emergencies."

"And this is what, some kind of deal you have with the Catholic Church?"

"Not specifically. Demons have been on Earth as long as we have. They're all over the world, in their different forms—Greek *daemons*, Persian *daevas*, Hindu *asuras*, Japanese *oni*. Most belief systems have some method of incorporating both their existence and the fight against them. Shadowhunters cleave to no single religion, and in turn all religions assist us in our battle. I could as easily have gone for help to a Jewish synagogue or a Shinto temple, or—Ah. Here it is." He brushed dust aside as Eddie knelt down beside him. Carved into one of the octagonal stones before the altar was a rune. Eddie recognized it, almost as easily as if he were reading a word in English. It was the rune that meant *Nephilim*.

Richie took out his stele and touched it to the stone. With a grinding noise it moved back, revealing a dark compartment underneath. Inside the compartment was a long wooden box; Richie lifted the lid, and regarded the neatly arranged objects inside with satisfaction.

"What are all these?" Eddie asked.

"Vials of holy water, blessed knives, steel and silver blades," Richie

said, piling the weapons on the floor beside him, "electrum wire—not much use at the moment, but it's always good to have spare—silver bullets, charms of protection, crucifixes, stars of David—"

"Jesus," said Eddie.

"I doubt he'd fit."

"Chee." Eddie was appalled.

"What?"

"I don't know; it seems wrong to make jokes like that in a church."

He shrugged. "I'm not really a believer."

Eddie looked at him in surprise. "You're not?"

He shook his head. Hair fell over his face, but he was examining a vial of clear liquid and didn't reach up to push it back. Eddie's fingers itched with the desire to do it for him. "You thought I was religious?" Richie said.

"Well." Eddie hesitated. "If there are demons, then there must be ..."

"Must be what?" Richie slid the vial into his pocket. "Ah," he said. "You mean if there's this"—and he pointed down, toward the floor—"there must be this." He pointed up, toward the ceiling.

"It stands to reason. Doesn't it?"

Richie lowered his hand and picked up a blade, examining the hilt. "I'll tell you," he said. "I've been killing demons for a third of my life. I must have sent five hundred of them back to whatever hellish dimension they crawled out of. And in all that time—in all that time—I've never seen an angel. Never even heard of anyone who has."

"But it was an angel who created Shadowhunters in the first place," Eddie said. "That's what Keene said."

"It makes a nice story." Richie looked at him through eyes slitted like a cat's. "My father believed in God," he said. "I don't."

"At all?" Eddie wasn't sure why he was needling him-he'd never given any thought to whether he believed in God and angels and so forth herself, and if asked, would have said he didn't. There was something about Richie, though, that made Eddie want to push him, crack that shell of cynicism and make him admit he believed in something, felt something, cared about anything at all.

"Let me put it this way," Richie said, sliding a pair of knives into his belt. The faint light that filtered through the stained-glass windows threw squares of color across his face. "My father believed in a righteous God. Deus volt, that was his motto- 'because God wills it.' It was the Crusaders' motto, and they went out to battle and were slaughtered, just like my father. And when I saw him lying dead in a pool of his own blood, I knew then that I hadn't stopped believing in God. I'd just stopped believing God cared. There might be a God, Eds, and there might not, but I don't think it matters. Either way, we're on our own."

"I should've been with him." Beverly said, putting another Cheetos to her mouth.

"Y-you can't blame yourself for t-that." Bill made a face when he ate another Cheetos. "Ugh, it's so spicy."

"It's supposed to be like that." Beverly said blandly. The three of them had returned to the Institute, not before Beverly could buy an entire bag of Cheetos. She was hungry and hadn't eaten since the morning.

Ben, who was standing at the doorway, approached Beverly and touched her shoulder. "He's gonna be fine. I promise."

"Really?" Bev pulled Ben's hand away quickly. "It seems like you don't even care about him."

"Well, I certainly don't want him to *die*."

The three of them were in the kitchen, waiting for Richie, Eddie and Stan to show up. But it had been twenty minutes and they hadn't returned.

"That's it," Beverly handed the bag to Bill and headed to the doorway. "I'm going to the hotel."

Ben grabbed her arm. "Wait, Bev, you—"

"Don't call me *Bev*, we're not friends."

"*Beverly*. If you go you might get hurt."

Beverly exhaled. "So, are we staying here doing nothing?"

"I have a M-Monopoly board in my room" Said Bill while chewing the Cheetos.

Beverly rolled her eyes. "Thanks Bill, selling toy houses will make me feel better."

Bill's eyes were glowing. "Really? O-Okay we n-need—"

"She was being *sarcastic*, Bill." Said Ben in a soft tone.

Bill's eyes came back to normal. "Oh, I k-knew that." He put another Cheetos to his mouth.

"I still think we should go back—"

"Wait," Bill said. "A-aren't you a witch? Can you m-make magical things?"

"I guess," Beverly shrugged. "Wait, how do you know that?"

"Richie told us, after Eddie punched me in the face." Ben said with a serious tone in the last part.

"He didn't do it on purpose," Beverly said. "He was scared, I would've done the same."

"Well," Ben aired his hand. "Can you show us? Your magic?"

"I don't know how to *use* it." She raised her hand in exasperation, she felt a wave of electricity running through her body, and Ben was flying through the room, before landing on the floor beside Bill. Bill had his mouth open, staring at Ben.

"Are you o-okay?"

"Holy...crap!" He said and touching his head. "What was *that*?"

"I..." Beverly stared at her hand, shocked. "I don't know."

"Y-your necklace." Bill said, the tip of his fingers were almost orange for eating too many Cheetos. "I t-think it's how you unlock it."

"Maybe," Ben said, he was still rubbing his head. "I know a few things about magic, maybe you can start practicing."

"Let me guess, with *you*?" Beverly almost laughed.

"I was thinking Eleven," Ben said. "She can be your teacher or something."

"I don't think Eleven likes me that much."

"W-what's the worst thing that c-could happen?" Bill said, before standing up and throwing the bag in the trash can.

"So, you're saying I should call her?" Beverly frowned. "I don't know her number, or if she even has a phone."

"Oh, trust me, she does."

Bill sighed. "Can we p-play Monopoly now?"

They were the only passengers in their train car heading back uptown. Eddie sat without speaking, thinking about Stan. Every once in a while Richie would look over at him as if he were about to say something, before lapsing back into an uncharacteristic silence

When they climbed out of the subway, the streets were deserted, the air heavy and metal-tasting, the bodegas and Laundromats and check-cashing centers silent behind their nighttime doors of corrugated steel. They found the hotel, finally, after an hour of looking, on a side street off 116th. They'd walked past it twice, thinking it was just another abandoned apartment building, before Eddie saw the sign. It

had come loose from a nail and it dangled hidden behind a stunted tree. HOTEL DUMONT, it should have said, but someone had painted out the N and replaced it with an R.

"Hotel Dumort," Richie said when Eddie pointed it out to him. "Cute."

Eddie had only had two years of French, but it was enough to get the joke. "Du mort," he said. "Of death."

Richie nodded. He had gone alert all over, like a cat who sees a mouse whisking behind a sofa.

"But it can't be the hotel," Eddie said. "The windows are all boarded up, and the door's been bricked over—Oh," he finished, catching Richie's look. "Right. Vampires. But how do they get inside?"

"They fly," Richie said, and indicated the upper floors of the building. It had once, clearly, been a graceful and luxurious hotel. The stone facade was elegantly decorated with carved curlicues and fleur-de-lis, dark and eroded from years of exposure to polluted air and acid rain.

"We don't fly," Eddie felt impelled to point out.

"No," Richie agreed. "We don't fly. We break and enter." He started across the street toward the hotel.

"Flying sounds like more fun." Eddie said, hurrying to catch up with him.

"Right now *everything* sounds like more fun."

18. The Hotel Dumort

Notes for the Chapter:

School is killing me!!! I don't think I'll update as fast as before, but I'll try my best :3

A hot wind had come up, stirring the leaves on the stunted trees outside the hotel, sending the trash in the gutters and on the sidewalk skittering across the cracked pavement. The area was oddly deserted, Eddie thought—usually, in Manhattan, there was always someone else on the street, even at four in the morning. Several of the streetlights lining the sidewalk were out, though the one closest to the hotel cast a dim yellow glow across the cracked pathway that led up to what had once been the front door.

"Stay out of the light," Richie said, pulling Eddie toward him by his sleeve.

"They might be watching from the windows. And don't look up," he added, but it was too late. Eddie had already glanced up at the shattered windows of the higher floors. For a moment he half-thought he glimpsed a flicker of movement at one of the windows, a flash of whiteness that could have been a face, or a hand drawing back a heavy drape—

"Come on." Richie drew Eddie with him to melt into the shadows closer to the hotel. Eddie felt his heightened nervousness in his spine, in the pulse in his wrists, in the hard beat of blood in his ears. The faint drone of distant cars seemed very far away, the only sound the crunch of his own shoes on the garbage-strewn pavement. He wished he could walk soundlessly, like a Shadowhunter. Maybe someday he'd ask Richie to teach him.

They slipped around the corner of the hotel into an alley that had probably once been a service lane for deliveries. It was narrow, choked with garbage: moldy cardboard boxes, empty glass bottles, shredded plastic, scattered things that Eddie thought at first were toothpicks, but up close looked like—

"Bones," Richie said flatly. "Dog bones, cat bones. Don't look too closely; going through vampires' trash is rarely a pretty picture."

Eddie swallowed down his nausea. "Well," he said, "at least we know we're in the right place," and was rewarded by the glint of respect that showed, briefly, in Richie's eyes.

"Oh, we're in the right place," Richie said. "Now we just have to figure out how to get inside."

There had clearly been windows here once, now bricked up. There was no door and no sign of a fire escape. "When this was a hotel," Richie said slowly, "they must have gotten their deliveries here. I mean, they wouldn't have brought things through the front door, and there's no place else for trucks to pull up. So there must be a way in."

Eddie thought of the little shops and bodegas near his house in Brooklyn. He'd seen them get their deliveries, early in the morning while he was walking to school, seen the Korean deli owners opening the metal doors set into the pavement outside their front doors, so they could carry boxes of paper towels and cat food into their supply cellars. "I bet the doors are in the ground. Probably buried under all this garbage."

Richie, a beat behind Eddie, nodded. "That's what I was thinking." He sighed. "I guess we'd better move the trash. We can start with the Dumpster." He pointed at it, looking distinctly unenthusiastic.

"You'd rather face a ravening horde of demons, wouldn't you?" Eddie said.

The corner of Richie's mouth twitched. "This is hardly the time for idle banter. We have garbage to haul." He stalked over to the Dumpster and took hold of one side of it. "You get the other. We'll tip it."

"Tipping it will make too much noise," Eddie argued, taking up his station on the other side of the huge container. It was a standard city trash bin, painted dark green, splotted with strange stains. It stank, even more than most Dumpsters, of garbage and something else, something thick and sweet that filled Eddie's throat and made him

want to gag. “We should push it.”

“Now, look—” Richie began, when a voice spoke, suddenly, out of the shadows behind them.

“Do you really think you should be doing that?” it asked.

Eddie froze, staring into the shadows at the mouth of the alley. For a panicked moment he wondered if he’d imagined the voice, but Richie was frozen too, astonishment on his face. It was rare that anything surprised him, rarer that anyone snuck up on him. Richie stepped away from the Dumpster, his hand sliding toward his belt, his voice flat. “Is someone there?”

“*Dios mío.*” The voice was male, amused, speaking a liquid Spanish. “You’re not from this neighborhood, are you?”

He stepped forward, out of the thickest of the shadows. The shape of him evolved slowly: a boy, not much older than Richie and probably six inches shorter. He was thin-boned, with the big dark eyes and honey-colored skin of a Diego Rivera painting. He wore black slacks and an open-necked white shirt, and a gold chain around his neck that sparked faintly as he moved closer to the light.

“You could say that,” Richie said carefully, not moving his hand away from his belt.

“You shouldn’t be here.” The boy raked a hand through the thick black curls that spilled over his forehead. “This place is dangerous.”

“We know,” Eddie said. “We just got a little lost, that’s all.”

The boy gestured to the Dumpster. “What were you doing with that?”

I’m no good at lying on the spot, Eddie thought, and looked at Richie, who, he hoped, would be excellent at it.

He disappointed him immediately. “We were trying to get into the hotel. We thought there might be a cellar door behind the trash bin.”

The boy’s eyes widened in disbelief. “*Put a madre*—why would you want to do something like that?”

Richie shrugged. "For a prank, you know. Just a little fun."

"You don't understand. This place is haunted, cursed. Bad luck." He shook his head vigorously and said several things in Spanish that Eddie suspected had to do with the stupidity of spoiled white kids in general and their stupidity in particular. "Walk with me; I'll take you to the subway."

"We know where the subway is," said Richie.

The boy laughed a soft, vibrant laugh. "*Claro*. Of course you do, but if you go with me, no one will bother you. You do not want trouble, do you?"

"That depends," Richie said, and moved so that his jacket opened slightly, showing the glint of the weapons thrust through his belt. "How much are they paying you to keep people away from the hotel?"

The boy glanced behind him, and Eddie's nerves twanged as he imagined the narrow alley mouth filling up with other shadowy figures, white-faced, red-mouthed, the glint of fangs as sudden as metal striking sparks from pavement. When he looked back at Richie, his mouth was a thin line. "How much are you paying me, *chico*?"

"The vampires. How much are they paying you? Or is it something else—did they tell you they'd make you one of them, offer you eternal life, no pain, no sickness, you get to live forever? Because it's not worth it. Life stretches out very long when you never see the sunlight, *chico*," said Richie.

The boy was expressionless. "My name is Adrian. Not *chico*."

"But you know what we're talking about. You know about the vampires?" Eddie said.

Adrian turned his face to the side and spit. When he looked back at them, his eyes were full of a glittering hate. "*Los vampiros, sí*, the blood-drinking animals. Even before the hotel was boarded up, there were stories, the laughter late at night, the small animals disappearing, the sounds—" He stopped, shaking his head. "Everyone

in the neighborhood knows to stay away, but what can you do? You cannot call the police and tell them your problem is vampires."

"Have you ever seen them?" Richie asked. "Or known anyone who has?"

Adrian spoke slowly. "There were some boys, once, a group of friends. They thought they had a good idea, to go into the hotel and kill the monsters inside. They took guns with them, knives too, all blessed by a priest. They never came out. My aunt, she found their clothes later, in front of the house."

"Sí. One of the boys was my brother," said Adrian flatly. "So now you know why I walk by here in the middle of the night sometimes, on the way home from my aunt's house, and why I warned you away. If you go in there, you will not come out again."

"My friend is in there," said Eddie. "We came to get him."

"Ah," said Adrian, "then perhaps I cannot warn you away."

"No," Richie said. "But don't worry. What happened to your friends won't happen to us." He took one of the angel blades from his belt and held it up; the faint light emanating from it lit the hollows under his cheekbones, shadowed his eyes. "I've killed plenty of vampires before. Their hearts don't beat, but they can still die."

Adrian inhaled sharply and said something in Spanish too low and rapid for Eddie to understand. He came toward them, almost stumbling over a pile of crumpled plastic wrappers in his haste. "I know what you are—I have heard about your kind, from the old padre at St. Cecilia's. I thought that was just a story."

"All the stories are true," Eddie said, but so quietly that Adrian didn't seem to hear him. He was looking at Richie, his fists clenched.

"I want to go with you," Adrian said.

Richie shook his head. "No. Absolutely not."

"I can show you how to get inside," Adrian said.

Richie wavered, temptation plain on his face. "We can't bring you."

"Fine." Adrian stalked by him and kicked aside a heap of trash piled against a wall. There was a metal grating there, thin bars filmed with a brownish-red coating of rust. He knelt down, took hold of the bars, and lifted the grating away. "This is how my brother and his friends got in. It goes down to the basement, I think." He looked up as Richie and Eddie joined him. Eddie half-held his breath; the smell of the garbage was overwhelming, and even in the darkness he could see the darting shapes of cockroaches crawling over the piles.

A thin smile had formed, just at the corners of Richie's mouth. He still had the angel blade in his hand. The witchlight that came from it lent his face a ghostly cast, reminding Eddie of the way Stan had held a flashlight under his chin while telling him horror stories when they were both eleven. "Thanks," he said to Adrian. "This will work just fine."

The other boy's face was pale. "You go in there and do for your friend what I could not do for my brother."

Richie slipped the seraph blade back into his belt and glanced at Eddie. "Follow me," he said, and slid through the grating in a single smooth move, feet first. Eddie held his breath, waiting for a shout of agony or amazement, but there was only the soft thump of feet landing on solid ground. "It's fine," Richie called up, his voice muffled. "Jump down and I'll catch you."

Eddie looked at Adrian. "Thanks for your help."

He said nothing, only held out his hand. Eddie used it to steady himself while he maneuvered into position. His fingers were cold. He let go as Eddie dropped down through the grating. It was only a second's fall and Richie caught him. He let Eddie go almost immediately. "You all right?"

"I'm fine."

Richie pulled the dimly glowing angel blade out of his belt and lifted it, letting its growing illumination wash over their surroundings. They were standing in a shallow, low-ceilinged space with a cracked

concrete floor. Squares of dirt showed where the floor was broken, and Eddie could see that black vines had begun to twine up the walls. A doorway, missing its door, opened onto another roanding, knees bent, just a few feet from him. He had followed them through the grating. He straightened up and grinned manically.

Richie looked furious. "I told you—"

"And I heard you." Adrian waved a dismissive hand. "What are you going to do about it? I can't get back out the way we came in, and you can't just leave me here for the dead to find ... can you?"

"I'm thinking about it," Richie said. He looked tired, Eddie saw with some surprise, the shadows under his eyes more pronounced.

Adrian pointed. "We must go that way, toward the stairs. They are up on the higher floors of the hotel. You will see." He pushed past Richie and through the narrow doorway. Richie looked after him, shaking his head.

"I'm really starting to hate mundanes," he said.

*****"

The lower floor of the hotel was a warren of mazelike corridors opening onto empty storage rooms, a deserted laundry—moldy stacks of linen towels piled high in rotted wicker baskets—even a ghostly kitchen, banks of stainless-steel counters stretching away into the shadows. Most of the staircases leading upstairs were gone; not rotted but deliberately chopped away, reduced to stacks of kindling shoved against walls, bits of once-luxurious Persian carpet clinging to them like blossoms of furry mold.

The missing stairs baffled Eddie. What did vampires have against stairs? They finally found an unharmed set, tucked away behind the laundry. Maids must have used it to carry linens up and down the stairs in the days before elevators. Dust lay thick on the steps now, like a layer of powdery gray snow that made Eddie cough.

"Shh," hissed Adrian. "They will hear you. We are close to where they sleep."

"How do you know?" Eddie whispered back. Adrian wasn't even supposed to be there. What gave him the right to lecture Eddie about noise?

"I can feel it." The corner of his eye twitched, and Eddie saw that he was as scared as Eddie was. "Can't you?"

Eddie shook his head. He felt nothing, other than strangely cold; after the stifling heat of the night outside, the chill inside the hotel was intense.

At the top of the stairs was a door on which the painted word LOBBY was barely legible beneath years of accumulated dirt. The door sprayed rust when Richie pushed it open. Eddie braced himself—

But the room beyond was empty. They were in a large foyer, its rotting carpeting torn back to show the splintered floorboards beneath. Once the centerpiece of this room had been a grand staircase, gracefully curving, lined with gilt banisters and richly carpeted in gold and scarlet. Now all that remained were the higher steps, leading up into blackness. The remainder of the staircase ended just above their heads, in midair. The sight was as surreal as one of the abstract Magritte paintings Sonia had loved. This one, Eddie thought, would be called *The Stairs to Nowhere*.

Eddie's voice sounded as dry as the dust that coated everything. "What do vampires have against stairs?"

"Nothing," said Richie. "They just don't need to use them."

"It is a way of showing that this place is one of theirs." Adrian's eyes were bright. He seemed almost excited. Richie glanced at him sideways.

"Have you ever actually seen a vampire, Adrian?" he asked.

Adrian glanced at him almost absently. "I know what they look like. They are paler, thinner, than human beings, but very strong. They walk like cats and spring with the swiftness of serpents. They are beautiful and terrible. Like this hotel."

Eddie turned to Richie. "Where are they, anyway? The vampires, I

mean.”

“Upstairs, probably. They like to be high up when they sleep, like bats. And it’s nearly sunrise.”

Like puppets with their heads attached to strings, Eddie and Adrian both looked up at the same time. There was nothing above them but the frescoed ceiling, cracked and black in places as if it had been burned in a fire. An archway to their left led farther into darkness; the pillars on either side were engraved with a motif of leaves and flowers. As Adrian glanced back down, a scar at the base of his throat, very white against his brown skin, flashed like a winking eye. Eddie wondered how he’d gotten it.

“I think we should go back to the servants’ stairs,” Eddie whispered. “I feel too exposed out here.”

Richie nodded. “You realize, once we get there, you’ll have to call out for Stan and hope he can hear you?”

Eddie wondered if the fear he felt showed on his face. “I—”

His words were cut short by a bloodcurdling scream. Eddie whirled.

Adrian. He was gone, no marks in the dust showing where he might have walked—or been dragged. Eddie reached for Richie, reflexively, but he was already moving, running toward the gaping arch in the far wall and the shadows beyond. Eddie couldn’t see him but followed the darting witchlight he carried, like a traveler being led through a swamp by a treacherous will-o’-the-wisp.

Beyond the arch was what had once been a grand ballroom. The ruined floor was white marble, now so badly cracked that it resembled a sea of floating arctic ice. Curved balconies ran along the walls, their railings veiled in rust. Gold-framed mirrors hung at intervals between them, each crowned with a gilded cupid’s head. Spiderwebs drifted in the clammy air like ancient wedding veils.

Adrian was standing in the center of the room, his arms at his sides. Eddie ran to him, Richie following more slowly behind him. “Are you all right?” Eddie asked breathlessly.

He nodded slowly. "I thought I saw a movement in the shadows. It was nothing."

"We've decided to head back to the servants' stairs," Richie said. "There's nothing on this floor."

Adrian nodded. "Good idea."

He headed for the door, not looking to see if they followed. He had gotten only a few steps when Richie said. "Adrian."

Adrian turned, eyes widening inquisitively, and Richie threw his knife.

Adrian's reflexes were quick, but not quick enough. The blade struck home, the force of the impact knocking him over. His feet went out from under him and he fell heavily to the cracked marble floor. In the dim witchlight his blood looked black.

"Richie," Eddie hissed in disbelief, shock pounding through him. He'd said he hated mundanes, but he'd never.

As Eddie turned to go to Adrian, Richie shoved him brutally aside. He flung himself on the other boy and grabbed for the knife sticking out of Adrian's chest.

But Adrian was faster. He seized the knife, then screamed as his hand came in contact with the cross-shaped hilt. It clattered to the marble floor, blade smeared black. Richie had one hand fisted in the material of Adrian's shirt, Sanvi in the other. It was glowing with such a bright light that Eddie could see colors again: the peeling royal blue of the wallpaper, the gold flecks in the marble floor, the red stain spreading across Adrian's chest.

But Adrian was laughing. "You missed," he said, and grinned for the first time, showing pointed white incisors. "You missed my heart."

Richie tightened his grip. "You moved at the last minute," he said. "That was very inconsiderate."

Adrian frowned and spit, red. Eddie stepped back, staring in dawning horror"

"When did you figure it out?" he demanded. His accent had faded, his words more precise and clipped now.

"I guessed in the alley," Richie said. "But I figured you'd get us inside the hotel, then turn on us. Once we'd trespassed, we'd have been out of the protection of the Covenant. Fair game. When you didn't, I thought I might have been wrong. Then I saw that scar on your throat." He sat back a little, still holding the blade at Adrian's throat. "I thought when I first saw that chain that it looked like the sort you'd hang a cross from. And you did, didn't you, when you went out to see your family? What's the scar of a little burn when your kind heal so quickly?"

Adrian laughed. "Was that all? My scar?"

"When you left the foyer, your feet didn't leave marks in the dust. Then I knew."

"It wasn't your brother who went in here looking for monsters and never came out, was it?" Eddie said, realizing. "It was you."

"You are both very clever," Adrian said. "Although not quite clever enough. Look up," he said, and lifted a hand to point at the ceiling.

Richie knocked the hand away without moving his glance from Adrian. "Eddie. What do you see?"

Eddie raised his head slowly, dread curdling in the pit of his stomach.

You must imagine this staircase the way it was once, with the gas lamps burning all up and down the steps, like fireflies in the dark, and the balconies full of people. They were filled with people now, row on row of vampires with their dead-white faces, their red stretched mouths, staring bemusedly downward.

"Vampires," Eddie whispered.

19. Vampires

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm back, b*tches!!!! Lmao

I'm sorry for not uploading for weeks now, life is busy and I barely have time to sit down and write I hope you understand :3

In case you already forgot what happened:

-Bev is a witch

-Stan was kidnapped by vampires

-Eds and Chee meet Adrian, who's also a vampire.

Richie said nothing. Though he hadn't moved, he was breathing in short quick pants, and Eddie could almost feel the strength of his desire to kill the vampire boy, to shove the knife through his heart and wipe that grin off his face forever.

"Richie," Eddie said warningly. "Don't kill him."

"Why not?"

"Maybe we can use him as a hostage."

Richie's eyes widened. "A hostage?"

Eddie could see them, more of them, filling the arched doorway, moving as silently as the Brothers of the Bone City. But the Brothers had not had skin so white and colorless, nor hands that curled into claws at the tips

Eddie licked his dry lips. "I know what I'm doing. Get him on his feet, Richie"

Richie looked at him, then shrugged. "All right."

Adrian snapped, "This isn't funny."

"That's why no one's laughing." Richie stood, hauling Adrian upright, jamming the tip of his knife between Adrian's shoulder blades. "I can pierce your heart just as easily through your back," he said. "I

wouldn't move if I were you."

Eddie turned away from them to face the oncoming dark shapes. He flung out a hand. "Stop right there," he said. "Or he'll put that blade through Adrian's heart."

A sort of murmur ran through the crowd that could have been whispering or laughter. "Stop," Eddie said again, and this time Richie did something, Eddie didn't see what, that made Adrian cry out in surprised pain.

One of the vampires flung an arm out to hold back his companions. Eddie recognized him as the thin blond boy with the earring that he'd seen at Eleven's party. "He means it," he said. "They are Shadowhunters."

Another vampire pushed her way through the crowd to stand at his side—a pretty blue-haired Asian girl in a silver foil skirt.

Eddie wondered if there were any ugly vampires, or maybe any fat ones. Maybe they didn't make vampires out of ugly people. Or maybe ugly people just didn't want to live forever. "Shadowhunters trespassing on our territory," she said. "They are out of the protection of the Covenant. I say we kill them—they have killed enough of ours."

"Which of you is the master of this place?" Richie said, his voice very flat. "Let him step forward."

The girl bared her pointed teeth. "Do not use Clave language on us, Shadowhunter. You have broken your precious Covenant, coming in here. The Law will not protect you."

"That's enough, Lily," said the blond boy sharply. "Our master is not here. She is in Idris."

"Someone must rule you in her stead," Richie observed.

There was a silence. The vampires up in the balconies were hanging off the railings, leaning down to hear what was being said. Finally, "Adrian leads us," said the blond vampire.

The blue-haired girl, Lily, let out a hiss of disapproval. "Jacob—"

"I propose a trade," Eddie said quickly, cutting off Lily's tirade and Jacob's retort. "By now you must know you took home too many people from the party tonight. One of them was my friend Stan."

Jacob raised his eyebrows. "You're friends with a vampire?"

"He's not a vampire. And not a Shadowhunter, either," he added, seeing Lily's pale eyes narrow. "Just an ordinary human boy."

They stared at him, white faces nearly expressionless. In another context Eddie would have said that they looked baffled.

He could feel Richie standing behind him, hear the rasp of his breathing. Eddie wondered if Richie was racking his brain trying to figure out why he'd let him drag them both here in the first place. Eddie wondered if Richie was starting to hate him.

"Do you mean this guy?"

Eddie blinked. Another vampire, a thin black boy with dreadlocks, had pushed his way to the front of the crowd. He was holding someone in his arms. "Stan?" Eddie whispered.

"He's unconscious." The vampire said.

Eddie reached out for Stan, his hands aching to hold him. But Lily stepped in front of him before he could take more than a step in his direction. "Wait," Lily said. "How do we know you won't just take the guy and kill Adrian anyway?"

"We'll give our word," Eddie said immediately, then tensed, waiting for them to laugh.

Nobody laughed. Adrian swore softly in Spanish. Lily looked curiously at Richie.

"Eddie," Richie said. There was an undercurrent of exasperated desperation in his voice. "Is this really a—"

"No oath, no trade," said Lily immediately, seizing on his uncertain

tone. "Elliot, hold on to that boy."

Eddie took the opportunity to whisper to Richie. "Just swear! What can it hurt?"

"Swearing for us isn't like it is for you mundanes," he snapped back angrily. "I'll be bound forever to any oath I make."

"Oh, yeah? What would happen if you broke it?"

"I *wouldn't* break it, that's the point—"

"Lily is right," said Jacob. "An oath is required. Swear that you won't hurt Adrian. Even if we give you the human back."

"I won't hurt Adrian," Eddie said immediately. "No matter what."

Lily smiled at him tolerantly. "It isn't you we're worried about." She shot a pointed look at Richie, who was holding Adrian so tightly that his knuckles were white. A patch of sweat darkened the cloth of his shirt, just between his shoulder blades.

Richie said, "All right. I swear it."

"Speak the oath," Lily said swiftly. "Swear on the Angel. Say it all."

Richie's grip on Adrian tightened convulsively. Eddie saw the swell of the muscles under his skin, the whitening of his fingers and at the sides of his mouth as he fought his anger. "He's a mundane," he said sharply. "If you kill him, you'll be subject to the Law—"

"He is on our territory. Trespassers are not protected by the Covenant, you know that—"

"You *brought* him here," Eddie interjected. "He didn't trespass."

"Technicalities," said Adrian, grinning at Eddie despite the knife at his throat. "Besides. You think we do not hear the rumors, the news that is running through Downworld like blood through veins? Pennywise is back. There will be no Accords and no Covenant soon enough."

Richie's head jerked up. "Where did you hear that?"

Adrian frowned scornfully. "All Downworld knows it. He paid a warlock to raise a pack of Raveners only a week ago. He has brought his Forsaken to seek the Mortal Cup. When he finds it, there will be no more false peace between us, only war. No Law will prevent me from tearing your heart out on the street, Shadowhunter—"

That was enough for Eddie. He dove for Stan, shouldering Lily aside, and snatched the boy out of Elliott's hands. Somehow, he felt stronger now, he could carry Stan as if he was a little rock. It was probably the anger, it made you do incredible things.

He turned to run, and felt hands catch at his jacket, holding him. He heard Richie shout his name, and turned to see that he had let go of Adrian and was racing toward Eddie. Eddie tried to go to him, but his shoulders were gripped by Jacob, his fingers digging into his skin.

Eddie cried out—and the noise was lost in a larger shriek as Richie, snatching one of the glass vials from his jacket, flung its contents toward him. He felt cool wetness splash his face, and heard Jacob scream as the water touched his skin. Smoke rose from his fingers and he released Eddie, howling a high animal howl. Lily darted toward him, crying out his name, and in the pandemonium, Eddie felt someone seize his wrist. He struggled to yank himself away.

"Stop it—you idiot—it's me," Richie panted in his ear.

"Oh!" He relaxed momentarily, then tensed again, seeing a familiar shape loom up behind Richie. Eddie cried out and Richie ducked and spun just as Adrian leaped at him, teeth bared, quick as a cat. His fangs caught Richie's shirt near the shoulder and tore the fabric lengthwise as Richie staggered.

Stan fell out of Eddie's arms and was now on the floor, eyes closed as if he were sleeping. Adrian clung on Richie like a gripping spider, teeth snapping at Richie's throat. Eddie fumbled in his pack for the dagger Richie had given him.

He held it in his hand and threw it at Adrian's throat. He'd never thrown a weapon before, never even thought of throwing one. But

now he had. Adrian let go of Richie, flailing backward, blood spurting as a stream of Spanish obscenities poured from his mouth.

Regaining his balance, Adrian tore the dagger free from his neck and flung it to the marble floor. Eddie bent down and snatched it up.

"Hold on to Stan." Richie had caught at Eddie's right arm, gripping with painful force. In the other hand he held a glowing seraph blade. "Move."

Richie began to half-pull him, half-push him, to the edge of the crowd. The vampires winced away from the light of the seraph blade as it swept over them, all of them hissing like scalded cats.

"Enough standing around!" It was Adrian. His neck was streaming blood, his lips curled back from his pointed incisors. He glared at the teeming mass of vampires milling in confusion. "Seize the trespassers," he shouted. "Kill them both—the human as well!"

The vampires started toward Richie and Eddie, some of them walking, others gliding, others swooping down from the balconies above like flapping black bats. Richie increased his pace as they broke free of the crowd, heading toward the far wall. Eddie, squirmed half-turning to look up at him. "Shouldn't we stand back to back or something?"

"What? Why?"

"I don't know. In movies that's what they do in this kind of ... situation."

Eddie felt him shake. Was he frightened? No, he was laughing. "You," Richie breathed. "You are the most—"

"The most *what*?" Eddie said, indignantly.

"Nothing, this isn't a situation, okay? I save that word for when things get really bad."

"*Really bad*? This isn't really bad? What do you want, a nuclear—"

The windows exploded inward in a shower of broken glass. Eddie

heard himself cry out, almost dropping Stan in the floor again, saw the vampires—barely an arm’s length from him and Richie—whirl in astonishment, shock mingling with terror on their faces. Through the shattered windows came dozens of sleek shapes, four-footed and low to the ground, their coats scattering moonlight and broken bits of glass. Their eyes were blue fire, and from their throats came a combined low growl that sounded like the roiling crash of a waterfall.

Wolves.

“Now *this*,” said Richie, “is a situation.”

The wolves crouched, low and snarling, and the vampires, looking stunned, backed away. Only Adrian held his ground. He still clutched his wounded neck, his shirt a smeared mess of blood and dirt. “*Los Niños de la Luna*,” he hissed. Even Eddie, whose Spanish was almost nonexistent, knew what he had said. The Moon’s Children—werewolves. “I thought they hated each other,” Eddie whispered to Richie. “Vampires and werewolves.”

“They do. They never come to each other’s lairs. Never. The Covenant forbids it.” He sounded almost indignant. “Something must have happened. This is bad. Very bad.”

“How can it be worse than it was before?”

“Because,” he said, “we’re about to be in the middle of a war.”

“HOW DARE YOU ENTER OUR PLACE?” Adrian screamed. His face was scarlet, suffused with blood .

The largest of the wolves, a brindled gray monster with teeth like a shark’s, gave a panting doglike chuckle. As he moved forward, between one step and the next he seemed to shift and change like a wave rising and curling. Now he was a tall heavily muscled man with long hair that hung in gray ropelike tangles. He wore jeans and a thick leather jacket, and there was still something wolfish in the cast of his lean, weathered face. “We didn’t come for a bleeding,” he said. “We came for the boy.”

Adrian managed to look furious and astounded at once.

"Who?"

The werewolf flung out a stiff arm, pointing at Eddie.

Behind him, Richie muttered something that sounded distinctly blasphemous. "You didn't tell me you knew any werewolves." Eddie could hear the slight catch under his flat tone—he was as surprised as Eddie was.

"I don't," Eddie said.

"This is bad," said Richie.

"You said that before."

"It seemed worth repeating."

"Well, it wasn't." Eddie shrank back against him. "Richie. They're all looking at me."

Every face was turned to him; most looked astonished. Adrian's eyes were narrowed. He turned back to the werewolf, slowly. "You can't have him," he said. "He trespassed on our ground; therefore he's ours."

The werewolf laughed. "I'm so glad you said that," he said, and launched himself forward. In midair his body rippled, and he was again a wolf, coat bristling, jaws gaping, ready to tear. He struck Adrian square in the chest, and the two went over in a writhing, snarling tangle. With answering howls of rage, the vampires charged the werewolves, who met them head-on in the center of the ballroom. The noise was like nothing Eddie had ever heard.

Then he heard a gasp, followed by loud coughs. Stan had opened his eyes and was looking at everyone in horror. "E-Eddie."

Before Eddie could say anything, Stan suddenly squirmed violently free of his grasp and leaped to the floor. "Stan!" Eddie screamed as Stan was starting to run. "Stan, stop!"

Richie's eyebrows made quizzical peaks. "What is he—"

Eddie dashed after Stan, who was crouched in the folds of velvet drapes. Stan yanked the drapes aside. They were slimy with mold, but behind them was—

"A door," Eddie gasped. "You genius maniac."

Stan smiled modestly, Richie was right behind her. "A door, eh? Well, does it open?"

Stan grabbed for the knob and turned to themm, crestfallen. "It's locked. Or stuck."

Richie threw himself against the door. It didn't budge. He cursed. "My shoulder will never be the same. I expect you to nurse me back to health." He said to Eddie, who rolled his eyes.

"Just break the door down, will you?"

He looked past him with wide eyes. "Eddie—"

He turned. A huge wolf had broken away from the melee and was racing toward him, ears flattened to its narrow head. It was huge, gray-black and brindled, with a long lolling red tongue. Eddie screamed. Richie threw himself against the door again, still cursing. Eddie reached for his belt, grabbed the dagger, and threw it.

The closest he'd come to weaponry before this week was drawing pictures of them, so Eddie was more surprised than anyone else, he suspected, when the dagger flew, wobbly but true, and sank into the werewolf's side.

It yelped, slowing, but three of its comrades were already racing toward them. One paused at the side of the wounded wolf, but the others charged for the door. Eddie screamed again as Richie hurled his body against the door a third time. It gave with an explosive shriek of grinding rust and tearing wood. "Three times the charm," he panted, holding his shoulder. He ducked into the dark space that gaped beyond the broken door, and turned to hold out an impatient hand. "Eddie, come on."

With a gasp he darted after him, Stan following them, and flung the door shut, just as two heavy bodies thudded against it. Eddie fumbled for the bolt, but it was gone, torn away where Richie had broken through it.

A stile whipped over his head, slicing dark lines into the moldering wood of the door. Eddie craned his neck to see what he'd carved: a curve like a sickle, three parallel lines, a rayed star: *To hold against pursuit.*

"Stan, are you okay?" He asked his best friend who looked like he was struggling to breathe.

"Surviving."

Eddie looked up. They were in a dank passageway; a narrow set of stairs led up into darkness. The steps were wood, the banisters filmy with dust.

They had reached the fourth featureless turn when a muffled explosion rocked the stairwell, and a cloud of dust billowed upward.

"They've gotten past the door," Richie said grimly. "Damn—I thought it would hold for longer."

"Do we run now?" Eddie inquired.

"Now we run," he said, and they thundered up the stairs, which shrieked and wailed under their weight, nails popping like gunfire. They were at the fifth landing now—Eddie could hear the soft *thud-thud* of the wolves' paws on the steps far below, or perhaps it was just his imagination.

The sixth landing rose in front of them and they half-flung themselves onto it. Eddie was gasping, his breath sawing painfully in his lungs, but he managed a weak cheer when he saw the door. It was heavy steel, riveted with nails, and propped open with a brick. He barely had time to wonder why, when Richie kicked it open, pushed Eddie and Stan through, and, following, slammed it shut. Eddie heard a definitive click as it locked behind them. Thank God, he thought.

Then he turned around.

The night sky wheeled above him, scattered with stars like a handful of loose diamonds. It was not black but a clear dark blue, the color of oncoming dawn. They were standing on a bare slate roof turreted with brick chimneys. An old water tower, black with neglect, stood on a raised platform at one end; a heavy tarpaulin concealed a lumpy pile of lumber at the other. "This must be how they get in and out," Richie said, glancing back at the door. Eddie could see him properly now in the pale light, the lines of strain around his eyes like shallow cuts. The blood on his clothes, mostly Adrian's, looked black. "They fly up here. Not that that does us much good."

"There might be a fire escape," Stan suggested. Together they picked their way gingerly to the edge of the roof. Eddie had never liked heights, and the ten-floor drop to the street made his stomach spin. So did the sight of the fire escape, a twisted, unusable hunk of metal still clinging to the side of the hotel's stone facade. "Or not," Stan said. Eddie glanced back at the door they had emerged from. It was set into a cabinlike structure in the center of the roof. It was vibrating, the knob jerking wildly. It would only hold for a few more minutes, perhaps less.

Richie pressed the backs of his hands against his eyes. The leaden air bore down on them, making the back of Eddie's neck prickle. He could see the sweat trickling into his collar. Eddie wished, irrelevantly, that it would rain. Rain would burst this heat bubble like a pricked blister.

Richie was muttering to himself. "Think, Tozier, think—"

Something began to take shape in the back of Eddie's mind. A rune danced against the backs of her eyelids: two downward triangles, joined by a single bar—a rune like a pair of wings

"That's it," Richie breathed, dropping his hands, and for a startled moment Eddie wondered if he had read his mind. Richie looked feverish, his gold-flecked eyes very bright. "I can't believe I didn't think of it before." He dashed to the far end of the roof, then paused and looked back at Eddie and Stan. "Come on."

Eddie followed him, pushing thoughts of runes from his mind. He had reached the tarpaulin and was tugging at the edge of it. It came

away, revealing not junk but sparkling chrome, tooled leather, and gleaming paint. “*Motorcycles?*”

Richie reached for the nearest one, an enormous dark red Harley with gold flames on the tank and fenders. Enough for three people. He swung a leg over it and looked over his shoulder at them. “Get on.”

Stan stared. “Are you kidding? Do you even know how to drive that thing? Do you have *keys*?”

“I don’t need keys,” he explained with infinite patience. “It runs on demon energies. Now, are you going to get on, or do you want to ride your own?”

Numbly Eddie slid onto the bike behind him. Somewhere, in some part of his brain, a tiny voice was screaming about what a bad idea this was. Oh no, it was Stan. He was behind Eddie, his hands trembling, holding Eddie's shoulders.

“Good,” Richie said. “Now put your arms around me.” Eddie did, feeling the hard muscles of Richie's abdomen contract as he leaned forward and jammed the point of the stole into the ignition. To Eddie's amazement he felt the motorcycle thrum to life under him.

The roof door burst open with a crash, torn from its hinges. Wolves poured through the gap, racing across the roof straight at them. Above them flew the vampires, hissing and screeching, filling the night with predatory cries.

Eddie felt Richie’s arm jerk back and the motorcycle lurch forward, sending his stomach slamming into his spine. Eddie clutched convulsively at Richie’s belt as they shot forward, tires skidding along the slates, scattering the wolves, who yelped as they leaped aside. He heard Stan shout something, his words torn away by the noise of wheels and wind and engine. The edge of the roof was coming up fast, so fast, and Eddie wanted to shut his eyes but something held them wide open as the motorcycle hurtled over the parapet and plummeted like a rock toward the ground, ten stories down.

Notes for the Chapter:

Omg I promise now to upload at least one chapter
per week :3

20. High and Dry

Notes for the Chapter:

Another chapter!! I used the little free time I had to post this, next will be later in the week probably :3

If Eddie screamed, he didn't remember it later. It was like the first drop on a roller coaster, where the track falls away and you feel yourself hurtling through space, your hands waving uselessly in the air and your stomach jammed up around your ears. When the cycle righted itself with a sputter and a jerk, he almost wasn't surprised. Instead of plunging downward they were now hurtling up toward the diamond-littered sky.

Eddie glanced back and saw a cluster of vampires standing on the roof of the hotel, surrounded by wolves. He looked away—if he never saw that hotel again, it'd be too soon.

"I'm going to die!" Stan was screaming, Eddie almost laughed. He forgot Stan was terribly scared of heights.

Belatedly, Eddie recollected something. "I thought you said only some of the vampire bikes could fly?" He asked Richie.

Deftly, Richie steered them around a stoplight in the process of turning from red to green. Below, Eddie could hear cars honking, ambulance sirens wailing, and buses puffing to their stops, but he didn't dare look down. "Only some of them can!"

"How did you know this was one of them?"

"I didn't!" he shouted gleefully, and did something that made the bike rise almost vertically into the air. Eddie shrieked and grabbed for his belt again.

"You should look down!" Richie shouted. "It's awesome!"

Sheer curiosity forced its way past terror and vertigo. Swallowing hard, Eddie opened his eyes.

They were higher than he had realized, and for a moment the earth swung dizzily beneath him, a blurring landscape of shadow and light. They were flying east, away from the park, toward the highway that snaked along the right bank of the city.

There was a numbness in Eddie's hands, a hard pressure in his chest. It was lovely, he could see that: the city rising up beside him like a towering forest of silver and glass, the dull gray shimmer of the East River, slicing between Manhattan and the boroughs like a scar.

The sky had begun to lighten, and in the distance Eddie could see the glittering arch of the Brooklyn Bridge, and beyond that, a smudge on the horizon, the Statue of Liberty.

"Are you all right?" Richie shouted.

Eddie said nothing, just clutched him more tightly. The same way Stan was clutching at him. Richie banked the cycle, and then they were sailing toward the bridge, and Eddie could see stars through the suspension cables. An early morning train was rattling over it—the Q, carrying a load of sleepy dawn commuters. Eddie thought how often he'd been on that train. A wave of vertigo swamped him, and he squeezed his eyes shut, gasping with nausea.

"Eds?" Richie called. "Eddie, are you all right?"

Eddie shook his head, eyes still shut, alone in the dark and the tearing wind with just the pounding of his heart.

Dizzy and sick, he looked and saw, beyond the outlines of the warehouses and factories, a sliver of golden sunrise just visible, like the edge of a pale gilt coin.

"I'm just looking at the sunrise."

Richie went rigid all over, as if he'd been shot. "Sunrise?" he yelled, then jerked the cycle savagely to the right.

Eddie leaned closer to Richie. "What's so bad about sunrise?"

"I told you! The bike runs on demon energies!" He pulled back so that they were level with the river, just skimming along the surface

with the wheels kicking up spray. River water splashed into Eddie's face. "As soon as the sun comes up—"

The bike began to sputter. Richie swore colorfully, slamming his fist into the accelerator. The bike lunged forward once, then choked, jerking under them like a bucking horse. Richie was still swearing as the sun peeked over the crumbling wharves of Brooklyn, lighting the world with devastating clarity.

Eddie could see every rock, every pebble under them as they cleared the river and hurtled over the narrow bank. Below them was the highway, already streaming with early traffic. They only just cleared it, the wheels grazing the roof of a passing truck. Beyond was the trash-strewn parking lot of an enormous supermarket.

The bike tilted and struck the asphalt of the parking lot, front wheel first. It shot forward, wobbling violently, and went into a long skid, bouncing and slamming over the uneven ground, whipping Eddie's head back and forth with neck-cracking force. The air stank of burned rubber. But the bike was slowing, skidding to a halt—and then it struck a concrete parking barrier with such force that he was lifted into the air and hurled sideways, his hand tearing free of Richie's belt. He barely had time to curl himself into a protective ball, holding his arms as rigid as possible, when they struck the ground. He could feel Stan's head colliding in his chest.

Eddie tried to say Stan's name, but the breath had been knocked out of him. He wheezed as he gasped in air.

He opened his eyes hazily. His face felt like one big bruise, his arms, aching and stinging, like raw meat. He had rolled onto his side and was lying half-in and half-out of a puddle of filthy water. Dawn had truly come—he could see the remains of the bike, subsiding into a heap of unrecognizable ash as the sun's rays struck it.

And there was Richie getting painfully to his feet. He started to hurry toward Eddie, then slowed as he approached. The sleeve of his shirt had been torn away and there was a long bloody graze along his left arm. His face, under the cap of dark gold curls matted with sweat, dust, and blood, was white as a sheet. Eddie wondered why he looked like that. Was his own torn-off leg lying across the parking lot

somewhere in a pool of blood?

Eddie started to struggle up and felt a hand on his shoulder. "Eddie?"

"Stan!"

Stan was kneeling next to him. His clothes were crumpled and grimy, but he seemed otherwise unharmed. He looked younger, defenseless, and a little dazed. He reached to touch Eddie's face, but he flinched back. "Ow!"

Stan threw his arms around him, holding him tightly. His clothes smelled of blood, sweat and dirt and a little bit of detergent, and his heart was beating a mile a minute and he was pressing on Eddie's bruises, but it was a relief nevertheless to be held by him and to know, really know, that he was all right.

"Eddie," he said roughly. "I thought—I thought you—"

"Wouldn't come back for you? But of course I did," Eddie said. "Of course I did."

He put his arms around Stan. Everything about him was familiar, from the overwashed fabric of his T-shirt to the sharp angle of the collarbone that rested just under his chin. When Eddie glanced back just for a moment, he saw Richie turning away as if the brightness of the rising sun hurt his eyes.

When Beverly opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was Mews staring at her with boring eyes. She almost screamed but then she realized where she was. She was in a little couch.

It was the Institute's kitchen, she could see her Cheetos package on the trash can. She frowned, she didn't remember falling asleep, her last memory of the previous night was playing Monopoly with Ben and Bill for two hours straight.

"Good Morning," A voice said behind her, Ben was staring at her, his hair was messy and wasn't wearing a shirt. She focused on his tanned skin and could feel herself turning red. He wasn't as muscular as

Richie was, but somehow his almost flat stomach made Beverly's heart start to beat fast.

"Where's your shirt?" Was the first thing that came to her mind.

"I find them uncomfortable, specially at night." He was approaching her, Beverly noticed he had a little scar across his belly button, it had the snap of a 'L'.

"Is Eddie—"

"They're not here yet, I've been waiting for them since I woke up."

"How did I fall asleep?"

"Oh, Bill started telling a story about werewolves and faeries and you just *had* to fall asleep. Trust me, it's better that way."

"He seems like a good guy though. Bill."

"Oh yeah, he is. He just doesn't know how to socialize with people, he only had us until you came along."

"That sounds rough,"

"Not really. My mom likes to say that family is first, above all."

"That's not entirely true, friends are important," Beverly sighed. "Family loves you because they *have* to. Sometimes is nice to have someone who likes you for who you *really* are."

Ben was now sitting on the couch, beside Beverly. She could see a few freckles around his eyes. It made him look more *cute*.

"With all of this going on, I never got the chance to ask, are you okay?" Ben was staring at her freckles too, as if they were an exotic landscape.

She shrugged. "Relatively."

"It must be hard, to find out that your whole life was a lie."

"I'm more angry than sad, actually." She got to her feet. "Do you have

a bathroom in this place?"

Ben seemed taken aback. "Down the hall, white door."

The hall felt like walking in a museum, every portrait looked like a expensive painting. She wondered if Ben could do something like that. She knew he was terrible at cooking, but didn't know what he was good at.

She entered the bathroom and closed the door after her, it looked like those bathrooms from the TV commercials. It was so clean and polished. There was a big bathtub on one corner, and a nice looking shower in the other. Everything was white, except the little blue soap bar on the sink.

She stared at the square shaped mirror, her hair was tangled and looked like a red jungle. She had prominent eye bags and there was a little drool around her mouth. She washed her face three times and stared again. Now she looked more presentable.

Eat, eat, eat.

The word echoed in her head, she almost jumped. It was like a static sound, a deep voice repeating those words. She turned around but she saw nothing. Just the white wall staring at her. She frowned, the lack of sleep was making her hear things.

Right?

When the boys arrived, Keene was enraged, he had been standing in the foyer. Ben and Bill were behind him. Beverly had a worried look on her face, and had immediately launched into a lecture that would have done Eddie's mother proud. He didn't forget to include the part about lying to him about where they were going—which Richie, apparently, had—or the part about never trusting Richie again, and even added extra embellishments, like some bits about breaking the Law, getting tossed out of the Clave, and bringing shame on the proud and ancient name of Tozier.

Winding down, he fixed Richie with a glare. "You've endangered

other people with your willfulness. This is one incident I will not allow you to shrug off!"

"I wasn't planning to," Richie said. "I can't shrug anything off. My shoulder's dislocated."

"If only I thought physical pain was actually a deterrent for you," said Keene with grim fury. "But you'll just spend the next few days in the infirmary with Bill and Ben fussing around you. You'll probably even enjoy it."

Keene had been two-thirds right; Richie and Stan both wound up in the infirmary, but only Ben was fussing over either of them when Eddie—who'd gone to clean himself up—came in a few hours later. Keene had fixed the swelling bruise on his arm, and twenty minutes in the shower had gotten most of the ground-in asphalt out of his skin, but he still felt raw and aching.

"Keene says he's on his way and he hopes you can both manage to cling to your flickering sparks of life until he gets here," he told Stan and Richie. "Or something like that."

"I wish he'd hurry," Richie said crossly. He was sitting up in bed against a pair of fluffed white pillows, still wearing his filthy clothes.

"Why? Does it hurt?" Eddie asked.

"No. I have a high pain threshold. In fact, it's less of a threshold and more of a large and tastefully decorated foyer. But I do get easily bored." He squinted at Eddie. "Do you remember back at the hotel when you promised that if we lived, you'd get dressed up in a nurse's outfit and give me a sponge bath?"

"Actually, I think you misheard," Eddie said. "It was Stan who promised you the sponge bath."

Richie looked involuntarily over at Stan, who smiled at him widely. "As soon as I'm back on my feet, handsome."

"I knew we should have left you there," said Richie.

Beverly, who was also with them, laughed and went over to Stan,

who seemed acutely uncomfortable surrounded by dozens of pillows and with blankets heaped over his legs.

Beverly sat down on the edge of Stan's bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Like someone massaged me with a cheese grater," Stan said, wincing as he pulled his legs up. "I broke a bone in my foot. It was so swollen, Bill had to cut my shoe off."

"Glad he's taking good care of you." Beverly let a small amount of mischief tone into her voice.

Stan just rolled his eyes and smiled. "Shut up, redhead."

Eddie smiled, seeing his best friends like that was epic, it made him forget the awful things that were happening.

"I'm going to my room." He pronounced. "Come and see me after Keene fixes you up, okay?" He told Stan.

"Sure." He nodded.

Eddie should have fallen instantly into bed, but despite his exhaustion, sleep remained out of reach. Eventually he pulled his sketchpad out of his backpack and started drawing, propping the tablet against his knees. Idle scribbles at first—a detail from the crumbling facade of the vampire hotel: a fanged gargoyle with bulging eyes.

An empty street, a single lamppost casting a yellow pool of illumination, a shadowy figure poised at the edge of the light. He drew Adrian in his bloody white shirt with the scar of the cross on his throat. And then he drew Richie standing on the roof, looking down at the ten-story drop below. Not afraid, but as if the fall challenged him—as if there were no empty space he could not fill with his belief in his own invincibility.

He tried to draw his mother, last. He had told Richie he didn't feel any different after reading the Gray Book, and it was mostly true. Now, though, as he tried to visualize his mother's face, he realized

there was one thing that was different in his memories of Sonia: He could see his mother's scars, the tiny white marks that covered her back and shoulders as if she had been standing in a snowfall.

It hurt, knowing that the way he'd always seen his mother, all his life had been a lie. He slid the sketchpad under his pillow, eyes burning.

There was a tap on the door—soft, hesitant. He scrubbed hastily at his eyes. "Come in."

It was Stan. Eddie hadn't really focused on what a mess he was. He hadn't showered, and his clothes were torn and stained, his hair tangled. He hesitated in the doorway, oddly formal.

Eddie scooted sideways, making room for Stan on the bed. There was nothing strange about sitting in bed with Stan; they'd slept over at each other's houses for years, made tents and forts with the blankets when they were small, stayed up reading comics when they were older.

"Beverly is teaching Ben how to play tic-tac-toe, that poor kid doesn't know anything."

Eddie laughed. "Did Keene fix you up?" He asked.

Stan nodded "Yeah. I still feel like I've been worked over with a tire iron, but nothing's broken—not anymore." He turned to look at Eddie. "Eddie, that you came for me—that you would risk all that—"

"Don't." He held up a hand awkwardly. "You would have done it for me."

"Of course," Stan, without arrogance or pretension, "but I always thought that was the way things were, with us. You know."

Eddie scrambled around to face him, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Stan, as if he were surprised to find himself explaining something that should have been obvious, "I've always been the one who needed you more than you needed me."

"That's not true." Eddie was appalled.

"It is," Stan said with the same unnerving calm. "You've never seemed to really need anyone, Eddie. You've always been so ... contained. All you've ever needed is your pencils and your imaginary worlds. So many times I've had to say things six, seven times before you'd even respond, you were so far away. And then you'd turn to me and smile that funny smile, and I'd know you'd forgotten all about me and just remembered—but I was never mad at you. Half of your attention is better than all of anyone else's."

Eddie tried to catch at his hand, but got his wrist. He could feel the pulse under Stan's skin. "I only ever loved four people in my life," he said. "My mom, Jim, Bev, and you. And I've lost all of them except both of you. Don't ever imagine you aren't important to me—don't even think it."

In the end, they lay against each other as they had when they were children: shoulder to shoulder, Eddie's leg thrown over Stan's. Flat on their backs, they stared up at the ceiling as they talked, a habit left over from the time when Eddie's ceiling had been covered with paste-on glow-in-the-dark stars. Where Richie had smelled like soap and limes, Stan smelled like someone who'd been rolling around the parking lot of a supermarket, but Eddie didn't mind

"The thing is," Stan was saying. "I was joking with Bill about his stutter."

Eddie thought of a number of things he wanted to say, and didn't say them. "I'm not sure that's Bill's kind of humor."

Stan cut a sideways glance at Eddie under his lashes. "Is he sleeping with Richie?"

Eddie's squeak of surprise turned into a cough. He glared at him. "Ew, no. They're practically related. They wouldn't do that." He paused. "I don't *think* so, anyway."

Stan shrugged. "Not like I care," he said firmly.

Eddie chuckled. "Sure you don't."

"I don't!" He rolled onto his side. "You know, initially thought Bill

seemed, I don't know—cool. Mysterious. Exciting. Different. Then, at the party, I realized he was actually crazy.”

"Why do you think that?"

He shook his head. "He's just really paranoid, he thinks everyone is gonna make fun of him." Stan sighed. "When I was in the bathroom and those vampires got me, I saw Bill trying to save me, but then he had this look on his face, regret, I think. And then backed off."

"Was it awful?"

"I don't really remember much between the party and landing in the hotel."

"Probably better that way."

Stan started to say something but was arrested mid-yawn. The light in the room had slowly faded. Disentangling himself from Stan and the bedsheets, Eddie got up and pushed aside the window curtains. Outside, the city was bathed in the reddish glow of sunset. The silvery roof of the Chrysler Building, fifty blocks downtown, glowed like a poker left too long in the fire. "The sun's setting. Maybe we should look for some dinner."

There was no response. Turning, he saw Stan was asleep, his arms folded under his head, legs sprawled.

Eddie sighed. *Now where I'm going to sleep?*

Not that he minded sharing a bed with Stan, but he hadn't exactly left him any room. Eddie considered poking him awake, but he looked so peaceful. Besides, he wasn't sleepy. He was just reaching for the sketchpad under the pillow when a knock sounded on the door.

He padded barefoot across the room and turned the doorknob quietly. It was Richie. Clean, in jeans and a gray shirt, his washed hair looked perfect. The bruises on his face were already fading from purple to faint gray, and his hands were behind his back.

"Were you asleep?" he asked. There was no contrition in his voice,

only curiosity.

“No.” Eddie stepped out into the hallway, pulling the door shut behind him. “Why would you think that?”

He eyed Eddie's baby-blue cotton tank top and sleep shorts set. “No reason.”

“I was in bed most of the day,” he said, which was technically true. “What about you? Aren't you exhausted?”

He shook his head. “Much like the postal service, demon hunters never sleep. ‘Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these—’”

“You'd be in major trouble if gloom of night did stay you,” Eddie pointed out.

He grinned. Unlike his hair, his teeth weren't perfect. An upper incisor was slightly, endearingly chipped.

Eddie gripped his elbows. It was chilly in the hallway and he could feel goose bumps starting up his arms. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“‘Here’ as in your bedroom or ‘here’ as in the great spiritual question of our purpose here on this planet? If you're asking whether it's all just a cosmic coincidence or there's a greater metaethical purpose to life, well, that's a puzzler for the ages. I mean, simple ontological reductionism is clearly a fallacious argument, but—

“I'm going back to bed.” Eddie reached for the doorknob.

Richie slid nimbly between him and the door. “I'm here,” he said, “because Keene reminded me it was your birthday.”

Eddie exhaled in exasperation. “Not until tomorrow.”

“That's no reason not to start celebrating now.”

Eddie eyed him. “You're avoiding Bill and Ben.”

He nodded. "Both of them are trying to pick fights with me."

"For the same reason?"

"I couldn't tell." He glanced furtively up and down the hallway. "Keene too. Everyone wants to talk to me. Except you. I bet you don't want to talk to me."

"I don't think Beverly wants to talk to you either."

Richie shook his head. "She can be really explosive."

"Anyway, I want to eat," Eddie said. "I'm starving."

Richie brought his hand out from behind his back. In it was a slightly crumpled paper bag. "I sneaked some food from the kitchen when Ben wasn't looking."

Eddie grinned. "A picnic? It's a little late for Central Park, don't you think? It's full of—"

He waved a hand. "Faeries. I know."

"I was going to say muggers," said Eddie. "Though I pity the mugger who goes after you."

"That is a wise attitude, and I commend you for it," said Richie, looking gratified. "But I wasn't thinking of Central Park. How about the greenhouse?"

"Now? At night? Won't it be—dark?"

He smiled as if it was a secret. "Come on, Eds. I'll show you."

21. Thinking of You

Notes for the Chapter:

#Reddie 7u7

In the half-light, the big empty rooms they passed through on their way to the roof looked as deserted as stage sets, the white-draped furniture looming up out of the dimness like icebergs through fog.

When Richie opened the greenhouse door, the scent hit Eddie, soft as the padded blow of a cat's paw: the rich dark smell of earth and the stronger, soapy scent of night-blooming flowers—moonflowers, white angel's trumpet, four-o'clocks—and some he didn't recognize, like a plant bearing a star-shaped yellow blossom whose petals were medallioned with golden pollen. Through the glass walls of the enclosure he could see the lights of Manhattan burning like cold jewels.

"Wow." Eddie turned slowly, taking it in. "It's so beautiful here at night."

Richie grinned. "And we have the place to ourselves. Ben and Bill hate it up here. They have allergies."

Eddie shivered, though he wasn't at all cold. "What kind of flowers are these?"

Richie shrugged and sat down, carefully, next to a glossy green shrub dotted all over with tightly closed flower buds. "No idea. You think I pay attention in botany class? I'm not going to be an archivist. I don't need to know about that stuff."

"You just need to know how to kill things?"

"That's right." He took a napkin-wrapped package out of the bag and offered it to Eddie. "Also," he added, "I make a mean cheese sandwich. Try one."

Eddie smiled reluctantly and sat down across from him. The stone floor of the greenhouse was cold against his skin, but it was pleasant

after so many days of relentless heat. Out of the paper bag, Richie drew some apples, a bar of fruit and nut chocolate, and a bottle of water. "Not a bad haul," Eddie said admiringly.

The cheese sandwich was warm and a little limp, but it tasted fine. From one of the innumerable pockets inside his jacket, Richie produced a bone-handled knife that looked capable of disemboweling a grizzly. He set to work on the apples, carving them into meticulous eighths. "Well, it's not birthday cake," he said, handing him a section, "but hopefully it's better than nothing."

"Nothing is what I was expecting, so thanks." Eddie took a bite. The apple tasted green and cool.

"Nobody should get nothing on their birthday." He was peeling the second apple, the skin coming away in long curling strips. "Birthdays should be special. My birthday was always the one day my father said I could do or have anything I wanted."

"Anything?" Eddie laughed. "Like what kind of anything did you want?"

"Well, when I was five, I wanted to take a bath in spaghetti."

"But he didn't let you, right?"

"No, that's the thing. He did. He said it wasn't expensive, and why not if that was what I wanted? He had the servants fill a bath with boiling water and pasta, and when it cooled down ..." He shrugged. "I took a bath in it."

Servants? Eddie thought. Out loud he said, "How was it?"

"Slippery."

"I'll bet." Eddie tried to picture him as a little boy, giggling, up to his ears in pasta. The image wouldn't form. Surely Richie never giggled, not even at the age of five. "What else did you ask for?"

"Weapons, mostly," he said, "which I'm sure doesn't surprise you. Books. I read a lot on my own."

“You didn’t go to school?”

“No,” he said, and now he spoke slowly, almost as if they were approaching a topic he didn’t want to discuss.

“But your friends—”

“I didn’t have friends,” he said. “Besides my father. He was all I needed.”

Eddie stared at him. “No friends at all?”

Richie met his look steadily. “The first time I saw Bill,” he said, “when I was ten years old, that was the first time I’d ever met another child my own age. The first time I had a friend.”

Eddie dropped his gaze. Now an image was forming, unwelcome, in his head.

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” Richie said, as if guessing his thoughts, though it hadn’t been him Eddie had been feeling sorry for. “He gave me the best education, the best training. He took me all over the world. London. Saint Petersburg. Egypt. We used to love to travel.” His eyes were dark. “I haven’t been anywhere since he died. Nowhere but New York.”

“You’re lucky,” Eddie said. “I’ve never been outside this state in my life. My mom wouldn’t even let me go on field trips to D.C. I guess I know why now,” he added ruefully.

"She was afraid you'd freak out? Start seeing demons in the White House?"

"There are demons in the White House?"

“I was kidding,” said Richie. “I think.” He shrugged philosophically. “I’m sure someone would have mentioned it.”

“I think she just didn’t want me to get too far away from her. My mom, I mean. After my dad died, she changed a lot.” Jim’s voice echoed in his mind. *You’ve never been the same since it happened, but Eddie isn’t Jonathan.*

"You're lucky," he said. "That way you don't miss him."

From anyone else it would have been an appalling thing to say, but there was no bitterness in his voice for a change, only an ache of loneliness for his own father. "Does it go away?" Eddie asked. "Missing him, I mean?"

He looked at Eddie obliquely, but didn't answer. "Are you thinking of your mother?"

No. He wouldn't think of his mother that way. "Of Jim actually."

Richie took a thoughtful bite of apple and said, "I've been thinking about him. Something about his behavior doesn't add up—"

"He's a coward." Eddie's voice was bitter. "You heard him. He won't go against Pennywise. Not even for my mother."

"But that's exactly—" A long clanging reverberation interrupted him. Somewhere, a bell was tolling. "Midnight," said Richie, setting the knife down. He got to his feet, holding his hand out to pull Eddie up beside him. His fingers were slightly sticky with apple juice. "Now, watch."

His gaze was fixed on the green shrub they'd been sitting beside, with its dozens of shiny closed buds. Eddie started to ask him what he was supposed to be looking at, but Richie held up a hand to forestall him. His eyes were shining. "Wait," he said.

The leaves on the shrub hung still and motionless. Suddenly one of the tightly closed buds began to quiver and tremble. It swelled to twice its size and burst open. It was like watching a speeded-up film of a flower blooming: the delicate green sepals opening outward, releasing the clustered petals inside. They were dusted with pale gold pollen as light as talcum.

"Oh!" said Eddie, and looked up to find Richie watching him. "Do they bloom every night?"

"Only at midnight," he said. "Happy birthday, Edward Kaspbrak."

Somehow, Eddie felt something in his chest when he said that, like a electric force coming out of his stomach. "Thank you."

"I have something for you," he said. He dug into his pocket and brought out something, which he pressed into Eddie's hand. It was a gray stone, slightly uneven, worn to smoothness in spots.

"Huh," said Eddie turning it over in his fingers. "When I said I didn't want anything for my birthday, I wasn't expecting a rock."

"Very amusing, my sarcastic friend. It's not a rock, precisely. All Shadowhunters have a witchlight rune-stone."

"Oh." He looked at it with renewed interest, closing his fingers around it as he'd seen Richie do in the cellar. He wasn't sure, but he thought he could see a glint of light peeking out through his fingers.

"It will bring you light," said Richie, "even among the darkest shadows of this world and others."

He slipped into his pocket. "Thank you, Chee, It was nice of you to give me anything." The tension between them seemed to press down on Eddie like humid air.

The midnight flower was already shedding petals. They drifted toward the floor, glimmering like slivers of starlight. "When I was twelve, I wanted a tattoo," Eddie said. "My mom wouldn't let me have that."

Richie didn't laugh. "Most Shadowhunters get their first Marks at twelve. It must have been in your blood."

"Maybe. Although I doubt most Shadowhunters get a tattoo of Donatello from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on their left shoulder."

Richie looked baffled. "You wanted a turtle on your shoulder?"

"I wanted to cover my chicken pox scar." He pulled the strap of the tank top aside slightly, showing the star-shaped white mark at the top of his shoulder. "See?"

Richie looked away. "It's getting late," he said. "We should go back downstairs."

Eddie pulled his strap back up awkwardly. As if Richie wanted to see his stupid scars.

The next words tumbled out of his mouth without any volition on his part. "Have you and Bill ever—dated?"

Now he did look at him. The moonlight leached the color out of his eyes. They were more silver than gold now. "Bill?" he said blankly.

"I thought—" Now he felt even more awkward. "Stan was—Anyway, never mind. It's none of my business."

He smiled unnervingly. "The answer is no. Parabatais can't date each other, it's against the law. But I only love Bill as a brother.

"You mean Bill and you never—"

"Never," said Richie.

"He should talk more," said Eddie. "Beverly was shy when I met her, but look at her now. Sometimes I'm embarrassed, people think I'm Beverly's girl-friend."

Richie smiled. "It's probably your face."

Eddie rolled his eyes. "I don't know why though, Beverly is much more beautiful than me."

"You are too," said Richie, "and very different from how she is."

Eddie said nothing to this, because he had nothing to say. Beautiful. Richie had called him beautiful. Nobody had ever called him that before, except his mother, which didn't count. Mothers were required to think you were beautiful. He stared at Richie.

"We should probably go downstairs," he said again. Eddie was sure he was making him uncomfortable with the staring, but he didn't seem to be able to stop.

"All right," Eddie said finally. To his relief, his voice sounded normal. It was a further relief to look away from Richie as he turned around. The moon, directly overhead now, lit everything nearly to daylight

brightness. In between one step and another he saw a white spark struck off something on the floor: It was the knife Richie had been using to cut apples, lying on its side.

Eddie jerked hastily back to avoid stepping on it, and his shoulder bumped Richie's—he put a hand out to steady Eddie, just as he turned to apologize, and then he was somehow in the circle of Richie's arm, and Richie was kissing him.

It was at first almost as if he hadn't wanted to kiss Eddie: Richie's mouth was hard on his, unyielding; then he put both arms around Eddie and pulled him against him. His lips softened. Eddie could feel the rapid beat of his heart, taste the sweetness of apples still on his mouth. He wound his hands into Richie's hair, as he'd wanted to do since the first time he'd seen him. His hair curled around Eddie's fingers, silky and fine. Eddie's heart was hammering, and there was a rushing sound in his ears, like beating wings—

Richie drew away from Eddie with a muffled exclamation, though his arms were still around him. “Don't panic, but we've got an audience.”

Eddie turned his head. Perched on a nearby tree branch was Gard, watching them beadily from bright black eyes. So the sound he'd heard had been wings rather than demented passion. That was disappointing.

“If he's here, Keene won't be far behind,” said Richie under his breath. “We should go.”

“Is he spying on you?” Eddie hissed. “Keene, I mean.”

“No. He just likes to come up here to think. Too bad—we were having such a scintillating conversation.” He laughed soundlessly.

They made their way back downstairs the way they had come, but it felt like a different journey entirely to Eddie. Richie was holding his hand, sending tiny electrical shocks traveling up and down Eddie's veins from every point where Richie touched him: his fingers, his wrist, the palm of his hand. His mind was buzzing with questions, but he was too afraid of breaking the mood to ask Richie any of them. He'd said “too bad,” so Eddie guessed their evening was over, at least

the kissing part.

They reached his door. Eddie leaned against the wall beside it, looking up at him. "Thanks for the birthday picnic," he said, trying to keep his tone neutral.

He seemed reluctant to let go of Eddie's hand. "Are you going to sleep?"

He's just being polite, Eddie told himself. Then again, this was Richie. He was never polite. He decided to answer the question with a question. "Aren't you tired?"

Richie's voice was low. "I've never been more awake."

Richie bent to kiss him, cupping Eddie's face with his free hand. Their lips touched, lightly at first, and then with a stronger pressure. It was at precisely that moment that Stan threw open the bedroom door and stepped out into the hall.

He was blinking and tousle-haired. "What the *hell*?" he demanded, so loudly that Eddie leaped away from Richie as if his touch burned him.

"Stan! What are you—I mean, I thought you were—"

"Asleep? I was," he said. The tops of his cheekbones had flushed dark red through his tan, the way they always did when he was embarrassed or upset. "Then I woke up and you weren't there, so I thought ..."

Eddie couldn't think of a thing to say. Why hadn't it occurred to him that this might happen? Why hadn't he said they should go to Richie's room? The answer was as simple as it was awful: He had forgotten about Stan completely.

"I'm sorry," Eddie said, not sure whom he was even speaking to. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw Richie shoot him a look of white rage, but when he looked at him, Richie looked as he always did: easy, confident, slightly bored.

"In future, Eds," he said, "it might be wise to mention that you

already have a man in your bed, to avoid such tedious situations.”

“You invited him into *bed*?” Stan demanded, looking shaken.

“Ridiculous, isn’t it?” said Richie. “We would never have all fit.”

“I didn’t invite him into bed,” Eddie snapped. “We were just kissing.”

“Just kissing?” Richie’s tone mocked him with its false hurt. “How swiftly you dismiss our love.”

“Richie ...”

Eddie saw the bright malice in his eyes and trailed off. There was no point. His stomach felt suddenly heavy. “Stan, it’s late,” he said tiredly. “I’m sorry we woke you up.”

“So am I.” He stalked back into the bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

Richie’s smile was as bland as buttered toast. “Go on, go after him. Pat his head and tell him he’s still your super special little guy. Isn’t that what you want to do?”

“Stop it,” Eddie said. “Stop being like that.”

His smile widened. “Like what?”

“If you’re angry, just say it. Don’t act like nothing ever touches you. It’s like you never feel anything at all.”

“Maybe you should have thought about that before you kissed me,” he said.

He looked at him incredulously. “*I kissed you?*”

Richie looked at him with glittering malice. “Don’t worry,” he said, “it wasn’t that memorable for me, either.”

Eddie watched him walk away, and felt the mingled urge to burst into tears and to run after him for the express purpose of kicking him in the ankle. Knowing either action would fill him with satisfaction,

Eddie did neither, but went warily back into the bedroom.

Stan was standing in the middle of the room, looking lost. Eddie heard Richie's voice in his head, saying nastily: *Pat his head and tell him he's still your super special little guy.*

He took a step toward Stan, then stopped when he realized what he was holding in his hand. Eddie's sketchpad, open to the drawing he'd been doing, one of Richie with angel wings. "Nice," Stan said. "All those Tisch classes must be paying off."

Normally, Eddie would have told him off for looking into his sketchpad, but now wasn't the time. "Stan, look—"

"I recognize that stalking off to sulk in *your* bedroom might not have been the smoothest move," he interrupted stiffly, tossing the sketchpad back onto the bed. "But I had to get my stuff."

"Where are you going?" Eddie asked.

"Home. I've been here too long, I think. Mundanes like me don't belong in a place like this."

Eddie sighed. "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I wasn't intending to kiss him; it just happened. I know you don't like him."

"No," Stan said even more stiffly. "I don't *like* flat soda. I don't *like* crappy boy band pop. I don't *like* being stuck in traffic. I don't *like* math homework. I *hate* Richie. See the difference?"

"He saved your life," Eddie pointed out, feeling like a fraud—after all, Richie had come along to the Dumort only because he'd been worried he'd get in trouble if Eddie got himself killed.

"Is that what this is about? You putting Beverly and me in danger so you could have sex with that dude?" He let out an acid tone.

Eddie frowned, speechless. "That's not—"

"Yes, he saved my life," said Stan dismissively. "But I don't go around kissing my saviours. I thought you were better than that."

Eddie's temper flared. "Oh, and now you're pulling a high and mighty trip on me?" he snapped. "You're the one who was going to ask the girl with the most 'rockin' bod' to the Fall Fling." He mimicked Belch's lazy tone. Stan's mouth thinned out angrily. "So what if Richie is a jerk sometimes? You're not my brother; you're not my dad; you *don't* have to like him. I've never liked any of your girlfriends, but at least I've had the decency to keep it to myself."

"This," said Stan, between his teeth, "is different."

"How? How is it different?"

"Because I see the way you look at him!" he shouted. "You left us alone! The friends you had for ten years! You prefer to be with a guy you just met!"

"Stan, my mom was kidnapped!" Eddie knew dimly that he was being horrible, the whole thing was horrible; they'd never even had a fight before that was more serious than an argument about who'd eaten the last Pop-Tart from the box in the tree house, but he didn't seem able to stop. "He's the only one who helped me!"

"Oh please, I bet you weren't thinking of your mom when you were kissing him."

"Guys," Beverly was at the doorway, watching the boys with a confused look on her face. "What's going on?"

Stan sighed angrily and looked at Eddie. "Go ahead Eddie, go with Richie. That's the only thing you care about." He said before storming out of the room without talking to Beverly.

Eddie watched him walk to the door as if paralyzed; he couldn't move to hold him back, as much as he wanted to. What could he say?

Beverly was looking at Stan now, she looked confused and scared. "What happened?"

Eddie walked to the door and got a hold of the knob. "Goodnight, Bev." He said, he could hear his own voice breaking, and closed the door.

He let the tears stream around his face, he didn't want his first kiss to be like this. He didn't want his birthday to be like this.

In that moment, Eddie felt alone.

Notes for the Chapter:

:c

22. Dilemmas of Power

Notes for the Chapter:

Omg I didn't think I would update this fast! But don't get used to it bc next week I have a lot of exams :c

After Beverly was gone, Eddie sank down onto the bed and picked up his sketchbook. He cradled it to his chest, not wanting to draw in it, just craving the feel and smell of familiar things: ink, paper, chalk.

He thought about running after Stan, trying to catch him. But what would he say? What could he *possibly* say?

He'd told Stan he only loved his mother, Jim, Bev and him. And yet—in those brief moments, up on the roof with Richie, Eddie had forgotten his mother. He'd forgotten Jim. He'd forgotten Beverly and Stan. And he'd been happy. That was the worst part, that he'd been happy.

Maybe this, he thought, losing Stan, maybe this is my punishment for the selfishness of being happy, even for just a moment, when my mother is still missing. None of it had been real, anyway. Richie might be an exceptional kisser, but he made it clear he didn't care about Eddie at all. He'd said as much.

He lowered the sketchbook slowly into his lap. Stan had been right; it was a good picture of Richie. Eddie had caught the hard line of Richie's mouth, the incongruously vulnerable eyes. The wings looked so real Eddie imagined that if he brushed his fingers across them, they'd be soft. He let his hand trail across the page, his mind wandering ...

And jerked his hand back, staring. His fingers had touched not dry paper but the soft down of feathers. His eyes flashed up to the runes he'd scrawled in the corner of the page. They were shining, the way he'd seen the runes Richie drew with his stele shine.

His heart had begun to beat with a rapid, steady sharpness. If a rune could bring a painting to life, then maybe—

Not taking his eyes off the drawing, he fumbled for his pencils. Breathless, he flipped to a new, clean page and hastily began to draw the first thing that came to mind. It was the coffee mug sitting on the nightstand next to his bed. Drawing on his memories of still life class, he drew it in every detail: the smudged rim, the crack in the handle. When he was done, it was as exact as he could make it. Driven by some instinct he didn't quite understand, he reached for the cup and set it down on top of the paper. Then, very carefully, he began to sketch the runes beside it.

Richie was lying on his bed, pretending to be asleep, for his own benefit, not anyone else's—when the banging on the door finally got to be too much for him. He hauled himself off the bed, wincing. Much as he'd pretended to be fine up in the greenhouse, his whole body still ached from the beating it had taken last night.

Eddie was clutching his sketchpad, his black hair was messy. Richie leaned against the door frame, ignoring the kick of adrenaline the sight of him produced.

He could think of only one reason for Eddie to be there, though it made no sense after what he'd said to him. Words were weapons, his father had taught him that, and he'd wanted to hurt Eddie more than he'd ever wanted to hurt anyone. He wanted Eddie to feel the same pain he was feeling right now.

"Richie," Eddie said. "This is important."

"Don't tell me," he said. "You've got a drawing emergency. You need a nude model. Well, I'm not in the mood. You could ask Keene," he added, as an afterthought. "I hear he'll do anything for a—"

"**RICHIE!**" he interrupted him, his voice rising to a scream. "**JUST SHUT UP FOR A SECOND AND LISTEN, WILL YOU?**"

Richie blinked.

Eddie took a deep breath and looked up at him. His eyes were full of uncertainty. An unfamiliar urge rose inside Richie: the urge to put his

arms around Eddie and tell him it was all right. He didn't. In his experience, things were rarely all right. "Richie," Eddie said, so softly that Richie had to lean forward to catch his words, "I think I know where my mother hid the Mortal Cup. It's inside a painting."

"What?" Richie was still staring at him as if he'd told him he'd found one of the Silent Brothers doing nude cartwheels in the hallway. "You mean she hid it behind a painting? All the paintings in your apartment were torn out of the frames."

"I know." Eddie glanced past Richie into his bedroom. It didn't look like there was anyone else in there, to his relief. "Look, can I come in? I want to show you something."

He slouched back from the door. "If you must."

Eddie sat down on the bed, balancing his sketchpad on his knees. The clothes Richie had been wearing earlier were flung across the covers, but the rest of the room was neat as a monk's chamber. There were no pictures on the walls, no posters or photos of friends or family. The blankets were white and pulled tight and flat across the bed. Not exactly a typical teenage boy's bedroom. "Here," Eddie said, flipping the pages until he found the coffee cup drawing. "Look at this."

Richie sat down next to him, shoving his discarded T-shirt out of the way. "It's a coffee cup."

Eddie could hear the irritation in his own voice. "I *know* it's a coffee cup."

"I can't wait till you draw something really complicated, like the Brooklyn Bridge or a lobster. You'll probably send me a singing telegram."

Eddie ignored him. "Look. This is what I wanted you to see." He

passed his hand over the drawing; then, with a quick darting motion, reached into the paper. When he drew his hand back a moment later, there was the coffee cup, dangling from his fingers. Eddie had imagined Richie leaping from the bed in astonishment and gasping something like "Egad!" This didn't happen-largely, he suspected, because Richie had seen much stranger things in his life, and also because nobody used the word "Egad!" anymore. His eyes widened, though. "You did that?"

Eddie nodded.

"When?"

"Just now, in my bedroom, after-after Stan left."

His glance sharpened, but he didn't pursue it. "You used runes? Which ones?"

Eddie shook his head, fingering the now blank page. "I don't know. They came into my head and I drew them exactly how I saw them."

"Ones you saw earlier in the Gray Book?"

"I don't know." Eddie was still shaking his head. "I couldn't tell you."

"And no one ever showed you how to do this? Your mother, for instance?"

"No. I told you before, my mother always told me there was no such thing as magic-"

"I bet she did teach you," he interrupted. "And made you forget it afterward. Eleven did say your memories would come back slowly."

"Maybe."

"Of course." Richie got to his feet and started to pace. "It's probably against the Law to use runes like that unless you've been licensed. But that doesn't matter right now. You think your mother put the Cup into a painting? Like you just did with that mug?"

Eddie nodded. "But not one of the paintings in the apartment."

"Where else? A gallery? It could be anywhere-"

"Not a painting at all," Eddie said. "In a card."

Richie paused, turning toward him. "A card?"

"You remember that tarot deck of Madame Dorothea's? The one my mother painted for her?"

He nodded.

"And remember when I drew the Ace of Cups? Later when I saw the statue of the Angel, the Cup looked familiar to me. It was because I'd seen it before, on the Ace. *My mother painted the Mortal Cup into Madame Dorothea's tarot deck.*"

Richie was a step behind Eddie. "Because she knew that it would be safe with a Control, and it was a way she could give it to Dorothea without actually telling her what it was or why she had to keep it hidden."

"Or even that she had to keep it hidden at all. Dorothea never goes out, she'd never give it away."

"And your mother was ideally placed to keep an eye on both it and her." Richie sounded almost impressed. "Not a bad move."

"I guess so." Eddie fought to control the waver in his voice. "I wish she hadn't been so good at hiding it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if they'd found it, maybe they would have left her alone. If all they wanted was the Cup-"

"They would have killed her, Eddie," Richie said. Eddie knew he was telling the truth. "These are the same men who killed my father. The only reason she may still be alive now is that they can't find the Cup. Be glad she hid it so well."

"I don't really see w-what any of this has to do w-with us," Bill said, looking blearily through his hair. Richie had woken the rest of the Institute's residents at the crack of dawn, except Beverly, who was already awake, and dragged them to the library to, as he said, "devise battle strategies." Bill was still in his pajamas, and so was Ben. Keene, in his usual sharp tweed suit, was drinking coffee out of a chipped blue ceramic mug. Only Richie, bright-eyed despite fading bruises, looked really awake. "I thought the s-search for the Cup was in the hands of the C-Clave now."

"It's just better if we do this ourselves," said Richie impatiently. "Keene and I already discussed it and that's what we decided."

"Well." Beverly gave a proud smile. "I'm game." She glanced at Eddie, who was uncomfortably standing beside Richie.

"Me too." Ben said immediately.

"I'm not," Bill said. "There are o-operatives of the Clave in this city right now looking f-for the Cup. Pass the information on to them and l-let them get it."

"It's not that simple," said Richie.

"It is simple." Bill sat forward, frowning. "This has nothing to do w-with us and everything to do with your-your addiction to d-danger."

Richie shook his head, clearly exasperated. "I don't understand why you're fighting me on this."

Because he doesn't want you to get hurt, Eddie thought, he suddenly thought of Stan. Where was he right now?

Richie was still talking. "Look, Dorothea-the owner of the Sanctuary-doesn't trust the Clave. Hates them, in fact. She does trust us."

"She trusts me," said Eddie. "I don't know about you. I'm not sure she likes you at all."

Richie ignored him. "Come on, Bill. It'll be fun. And think of the glory if we bring the Mortal Cup back to Derry! Our names will never be forgotten."

"I don't c-care about glory," said Bill, his eyes never leaving Richie's face. "I care about not doing anything s-stupid."

"In this case, however, Richie is right," said Keene. "If the Clave were to come to the Sanctuary, it would be a disaster. Dorothea would flee with the Cup and would probably never be found. No, Sonia clearly wanted only one person to be able to find the Cup, and that is Eddie, and Eddie alone."

"Then let Eddie go alone," said Bill.

Even Ben gave a little gasp at that. Beverly stood up straight and looked at Bill coolly. "Then stay, act like an afraid little chicken."

Bill went white. "I'm not afraid," he said.

"Good," said Richie. "Then there's no problem, is there?" He looked around the room. "We're all in this together."

Bill mumbled an affirmative, while Ben shook his head in a vigorous nod. "Sure," he said. "It sounds fun."

"I don't know about fun," said Eddie. "But I'm in, of course."

"But Eddie," Keene said quickly. "If you are concerned about the danger, you don't need to go. We can notify the Clave-"

"No," Eddie said, surprising himself. "My mom wanted me to find it. Not Pennywise, and not them, either." *It wasn't the monsters she was hiding from*, Eleven had said. "If she really spent her whole life trying to keep Pennywise away from this thing, this is the least I can do."

Keene smiled at him. "I think she knew you would say that," he said.

"Don't worry, anyway," Ben said. "You'll be fine. We can handle a couple of Forsaken. They're crazy, but they're not very smart."

"And a lot easier to deal with than demons," said Richie. "Not so tricky. Oh, and we're going to need a car," he added. "Preferably a big one."

"Why?" said Ben. "We've never needed a car before."

"We've never had to worry about having an immeasurably precious object with us before. I don't want to haul it on the L train," Richie explained.

"There's taxis," said Beverly. "And rental vans."

Richie shook his head. "I want an environment we control. I don't want to deal with taxi drivers or mundane rental companies when we're doing something this important."

"Don't you have a driver's license or a c-car?" Bill asked Eddie. "I thought all m-mundanes had those."

"Not when they're fifteen," Eddie said crossly. "I was supposed to get one this year, but not yet."

"Stan's got a license." Beverly suddenly said.

Eddie really wished she didn't say that.

"Does he?" said Richie, in an aggravatingly thoughtful tone.

"But he hasn't got a car," Eddie added quickly.

"So does he drive his parents' car?" Richie asked.

Eddie sighed, settling back against the desk. "No. Usually he drives Belch's van. Like, to gigs and stuff. Sometimes Belch lets him borrow it for other stuff. Like if he has a date."

Richie snorted. "He picks up his dates in a van? No wonder he's such a hit with the ladies."

"It's a car," Beverly said. "You're just mad Stan has something you haven't got."

"He has many things I haven't got," said Richie. "Like nearsightedness, bad posture, and an appalling lack of coordination."

"You know," Eddie said, "most psychologists agree that hostility is really just sublimated sexual attraction."

"Ah," said Richie blithely, "that might explain why I so often run into people who seem to dislike me."

"I don't dislike you," said Bill quickly.

"That is because we share a brotherly affection," said Richie, striding over to the desk. He took the black telephone and held it out to Eddie. "Call him."

"Call who?" Eddie said, stalling for time. "Belch? He'd never lend me his car."

"Stan," said Richie. "Call Stan and ask him if he'll drive us to your house."

Eddie made a last effort. "Don't you know any Shadowhunters who have cars?"

"In New York?" Richie's grin faded. "Look, everyone's in Derry for the Accords, and anyway, they'd insist on coming with us. It's this or nothing."

With a scowl, Eddie stalked over to the desk and snatched the telephone out of Richie's hand. He didn't have to think before dialing. Stan's number was as familiar to Eddie as his own. He braced himself to deal with his mother or his sister, but Stan picked up on the second ring. "Hello?"

"Stan?"

Silence.

Richie was looking at him. Eddie squeezed his eyes shut, trying to pretend he wasn't there. "It's me," he said. "Eddie."

"I *know* who it is." He sounded irritated. "I was asleep, you know."

"I know. It's early. I'm sorry." Eddie twirled the phone cord around his finger. "I need to ask you for a favor."

There was another silence before Stan laughed bleakly. "You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding," he said. "We know where the Mortal Cup is, and we're prepared to go get it. The only thing is, we need a car."

Stan laughed again. "Sorry, are you telling me that your demon-slaying buddies need to be driven to their next assignation with the forces of darkness by *my mom*?"

"Actually, I thought you could ask Belch if you could borrow the van."

"Eddie, if you think that I-"

"If we get the Mortal Cup, I'll have a way to get my mom back. It's the only reason Pennywise hasn't killed her or let her go."

Stan let out a long, whistling breath. "You think it's going to be that easy to make a trade? Eddie, I don't know."

"I don't know either, but Pennywise could be torturing her. He could *kill* her. I have to do anything I can to get her back-just like I did for you."

Pause. "Maybe you're right. I don't know, this isn't really my world. Look, where are we driving to, exactly? So I can tell Belch."

"Don't bring him," Eddie said quickly.

"I know," he replied with exaggerated patience. "I'm not stupid."

"We're driving to my house. It's in my house."

There was a short silence-bewilderment this time. "In your house? I thought your house was full of zombies."

"Forsaken warriors. They're not zombies. Anyway, Richie and the others can take care of them while I get the Cup."

"Why do *you* have to get the Cup?" Stan sounded alarmed.

"Because I'm the only one who can," Eddie said. "Pick us up at the corner as soon as you can."

He muttered something nearly inaudible, then: "Fine."

Eddie opened his eyes. The world swam before him in a blur of tears. "Thanks, Stan," he said. "You're a-

But he had hung up.

"It occurs to me," said Keene, "that the dilemmas of power are always the same."

Eddie glanced at him sideways. "What do you mean?" He sat on the window seat in the library, Keene in his chair with Gard on the armrest. The remains of breakfast-sticky jam, toast crumbs, and smears of butter-clung to a stack of plates on the low table that no one had seemed inclined to clear away. After breakfast they had scattered to prepare themselves, and Eddie had been the first one back. This was hardly surprising, considering that all he had to do was pull on jeans and a shirt, while everyone else had to arm themselves heavily, even Beverly. She had to go to her house for a change of clothes, thankfully, it was close to the Institute. Having lost Keene's dagger in the hotel, the only remotely supernatural object Eddie had on him was the witchlight stone in his pocket.

"I was thinking of your Stan," Keene said. "And Ben and Beverly, amongst others."

Eddie glanced out the window. It was raining, thick fat drops spattering against the panes. The sky was an impenetrable gray. "What do they have to do with each other?"

"Where there is love, there is often also hate. They can exist side by side."

"I don't think Ben *loves* Beverly, and besides Stan doesn't hate me."

"He might grow to, over time," Eddie didn't know if he meant Stan or Ben. "I know you do not intend to hurt him, and in some cases necessity trumps nicety of feeling. But the situation has put me in mind of another. Do you still have that photograph I gave you?"

Eddie shook his head. "Not on me. It's back in my room. I could go get it-"

"No." Keene stroked Gard's ebony feathers. "When your mother was young, she had a best friend, just as you have Stan. They were as close as siblings. In fact, they were often mistaken for brother and sister. As they grew older, it became clear to everyone around them that he was in love with her, but she never saw it. She always called him a 'friend.'"

Eddie stared at Keene. "Do you mean Jim?"

"Yes," said Keene. "Jimothy always thought he and Sonia would be together. When she met and loved Bob, he could not bear it. After they were married, he left the Circle, disappeared-and let us all think that he was dead."

"He never said-never even hinted at anything like that," Eddie said. "All these years, he could have asked her-"

"He knew what the answer would be," said Keene, looking past him toward the rain-spattered skylight. "Jim was never the sort of man who would have deluded himself. No, he contented himself with being near her-assuming, perhaps, that over time her feelings might change."

"But if he loved her, why did he tell those men he didn't care what happened to her? Why did he refuse to let them tell him where she was?"

"As I said before, where there is love, there is also hatred," said Keene. "She hurt him badly all those years ago. She turned her back on him. And yet he has played her faithful lapdog ever since, never remonstrating, never accusing, never confronting her with his feelings. Perhaps he saw an opportunity to turn the tables. To hurt her as he'd been hurt."

"Jim wouldn't do that." But Eddie was remembering Jim's icy tone as he told Eddie not to ask him for favors. Eddie saw the hard look in his eyes as he faced Pennywise's men. That wasn't the Jim he'd known, the Jim he'd grown up with. That Jim would never have

wanted to punish his mother for not loving him enough or in the right way. "But she did love him," Eddie said, speaking aloud without realizing it. "It just wasn't the same way he loved her. Isn't that enough?"

"Perhaps he didn't think so."

"What will happen after we get the Cup?" Eddie said. "How will we reach Pennywise to let him know we have it?"

"Gard will find him."

The rain smashed against the windows. Eddie shivered. "I'm going to get a jacket," he said, slipping off the window seat. He found his green and red hoodie stuffed down at the bottom of his backpack. When he pulled it out, he heard something crinkle. It was the photograph of the Circle, his mother and Pennywise. He looked at it for a long moment before slipping it back into the bag.

When he returned to the library, the others were all gathered there: Keene sitting watchfully on the desk with Gard on his shoulder, Richie all in black, Ben with his demon-stomping shoes and gold whip, and Bill with a quiver of arrows strapped across his shoulder and a leather bracer sheathing his right arm from wrist to elbow. Beverly looked the most normal amongst them, with her pink jacket and loose jeans. Ben, Bill and Richie were covered in freshly applied Marks, every inch of bare skin inked with swirling patterns. Richie had his left sleeve pulled up, chin on his shoulder, and was frowning as he scrawled an octagonal Mark on the skin of his upper arm.

Bill looked over at Richie. "You're m-messing it up," he said. "Let me do that."

"I'm left-handed," Richie pointed out, but he spoke mildly and held his stele out. Bill looked relieved as he took it, as if he hadn't been sure until now that he was forgiven for his earlier behavior. "It's a basic *iratze*," Richie said as Bill bent his dark head over Richie's arm, carefully tracing the lines of the healing rune. Richie winced as the stele slid over his skin, his eyes half-closing and his fist tightening until the muscles of his left arm stood out like cords. "By the Angel,

Bill-

"I'm trying to be c-careful," said Bill. He let go of Richie's arm and stepped back to admire his handiwork. "There."

Richie unclenched his fist, lowering his arm. "Thanks." He seemed to sense Eddie's presence then, glancing over at him, his gold eyes narrowing. "Eds."

"You look ready," Eddie said as Bill, suddenly flushed, moved away from Richie and busied himself with his arrows.

"We are," Richie said. "Do you still have that dagger I gave you?"

"No. I lost it in the Dumort, remember?"

"That's right." Richie looked at him, pleased. "Nearly killed a werewolf with it. I remember."

Ben, who had been standing by the window, rolled his eyes. "I forgot that's what gets you all hot and bothered, Richie. Killing things."

"I like anyone killing things," he said equably. "Especially me."

Beverly glanced anxiously toward the clock on the desk. "We should go downstairs. Stan will be here any minute."

Keene stood up from his chair. He looked very tired, Eddie thought, as if he hadn't slept in days. "May the Angel watch over you all," he said, and Gard rose up from his shoulder into the air cawing loudly, just as the noon bells began to ring.

It was still drizzling when Stan pulled the van up at the corner and honked twice. Eddie's heart leaped-some part of him had been worried that he wasn't going to show up.

Richie squinted through the dripping rain. The five of them had taken shelter under a carved stone cornice. "*That's* the van? It looks like a rotting banana."

This was undeniable-Belch had painted the van a neon shade of yellow, and it was blotched with dings and rust like splotches of decay. Stan honked again. Eddie could see him, a blurred shape through the wet windows. He sighed and pulled his hood up to cover his head. "Let's go."

They splashed through the filthy puddles that had collected on the pavement. Stan, leaving the motor idling, crawled into the back to pull the door aside, revealing seats whose upholstery had half-rotted through. Dangerous-looking springs poked through the gaps. Ben wrinkled his nose. "Is it safe to sit?"

"Safer than being strapped to the roof," said Stan pleasantly, "which is your other option." He nodded a greeting to Bill, Richie and Bev, ignoring Eddie completely. "Hey."

Stan directed him to the back, where the boys usually kept their musical instruments, while Bill and Ben crawled into the van's interior and perched on the seats. "Shotgun!" announced Eddie as Beverly and Richie came back around the side of the van.

Bill grabbed for his bow, strapped across his back. "W-Where?"

"He means he wants the front seat," said Beverly, pushing wet hair out of her eyes.

"That's a nice bow," said Stan, with a nod toward Bill.

Bill blinked, color running through his cheeks, rain running off his eyelashes. "Do you know much about a-archery?" he asked, in a tone that suggested that he doubted it.

"I did archery at camp," said Stan. "Six years running."

"C-Cool."

Beverly glanced up at the lowering sky. "We should go before it starts pouring again."

The front seat of the car was covered in Doritos wrappers and Dunkin Donuts crumbs. Eddie brushed away what he could. Stan started the car before Eddie had finished, flinging him back against the seat.

"Ouch," Eddie said reprovingly.

"Sorry." Stan didn't look at him.

"So what's with that 'hey' thing?" Beverly, who had a tired look on her face, asked as Stan maneuvered the car onto the FDR parkway, the highway that ran alongside the East River.

"What 'hey' thing?" he replied, cutting off a black SUV whose occupant, a suited man with a cell phone in his hand, made an obscene gesture at them through the tinted windows.

"The 'hey' thing that guys always do. Like when you saw Bill and Richie, you said 'hey,' and they said 'hey' back. What's wrong with 'hello'?"

Eddie thought he saw a muscle twitch in his cheek. "'Hello' is girly," Stan informed Bev. "Real men are terse. Laconic."

"So the more manly you are, the less you say?" Eddie asked.

"Right." Stan nodded. Past him, Eddie could see the humid fog lowering over the East River, shrouding the waterfront in feathery gray mist. The water itself was the color of lead, churned to a whipped cream consistency by the steady wind. "That's why when major badasses greet each other in movies, they don't say anything, they just nod. The nod means, 'I am a badass, and I recognize that you, too, are a badass,' but they don't say anything because they're Wolverine and Magneto and it would mess up their vibe to explain."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," said Richie, from the backseat.

"Good," Eddie and Beverly said at the same time, and was rewarded by the smallest of smiles from Stan as he turned the van onto the Manhattan Bridge, heading toward Brooklyn and home.

23. The Mortal Cup

By the time they reached Eddie's house, it had finally stopped raining. Threaded beams of sunlight were burning away the remnants of mist, and the puddles on the sidewalk were drying. Richie, Bill and Ben made Stan, Beverly and Eddie wait by the van while they went to check, as Richie said, the "demonic activity levels."

Stan watched as the three Shadowhunters headed up the rose-lined walkway to the house. "Demonic activity levels? Do they have a device that measures whether the demons inside the house are doing power yoga?"

"No," Eddie said, pushing his damp hood back so he could enjoy the feel of the sunlight on his hair. "The Sensor tells them how powerful the demons are—if there are any."

Stan looked impressed. "That is useful."

Beverly turned to him. "What the hell happened between the two of you last night?"

Stan held up a hand. "We don't have to talk about it. In fact, I'd rather not."

"Just let me say one thing," Eddie spoke quickly. "I know you're mad at me for what happened—"

"Understatement of the year." Stan rolled his eyes.

"Can one of you explain to me what the hell is going on?" Beverly sounded annoyed.

Stan looked at her. "To summary, Eddie kissed Richie, the King of Assholes."

Beverly gasped and looked at Eddie. "Is that—"

"He kissed *me*, but yes," Eddie felt ashamed for some reason. "If you're gonna judge me too—"

"I'm not gonna judge you," Beverly said. "I'm not gonna tell you who you should or shouldn't like, but Eddie...Do you? *Like* Richie?"

Eddie was about to say something. "I—"

"All right," came Richie's voice, interrupting them. Eddie turned hastily. "We've checked all four corners of the house—nothing. Low activity. Probably just the Forsaken, and they might not even bother us unless we try getting into the upstairs apartment."

"And if they do," Ben said, with a grin on his face, "we'll be ready for them."

Bill dragged the heavy canvas bag out of the back of the van, dropping it on the sidewalk. "Ready to g-go," he announced. "Let's kick some d-demon butt!"

Richie looked at him a little oddly. "You all right?"

"Fine." Not looking at him, Bill discarded his bow and arrow in favor of a polished wooden featherstaff, with two glittering blades that appeared at a light touch from his fingers. "T-this is better."

Ben looked at his adoptive brother with concern. "But the bow ..."

Bill cut him off. "I know what I'm doing, B-Ben."

The bow lay across the backseat, gleaming in the sunlight. Stan reached for it, then drew his hand back as a laughing group of young women pushing strollers headed up the street in the direction of the park. They took no notice of the three heavily armed teenagers crouched by the yellow van. "How come I can see you guys?" Stan asked. "What happened to that invisibility magic of yours?"

"You can see us," said Richie, "because now you know the truth of what you're looking at."

"Yeah," said Stan. "I guess I do."

He protested a little when they asked him to stay by the van, but Richie impressed upon him the importance of having a getaway vehicle idling by the curb. "Sunlight's fatal to demons, but it won't

hurt the Forsaken. What if they chase us? What if the car gets towed?" Ben suggested to bring Beverly with them in case they needed magic.

"But I don't know how to control it," Beverly said.

"Then I'll watch out for you." Ben smiled at her. She just shook her head rolling her eyes, but Eddie could see a little smile creeping up on her lips.

The last Eddie saw of Stan as he turned to wave from the front porch was his long legs propped up on the dashboard as he sorted through Belch's CD collection. Eddie breathed a sigh of relief. At least Stan was safe.

The smell hit him the moment they walked through the front door. It was almost indescribable, like spoiled eggs and maggots and seaweed rotting on a hot beach. Ben and Beverly wrinkled their noses and Bill turned greenish, but Richie looked as if he were inhaling rare perfume. "Demons have been here," he announced, with cold delight. "Recently, too."

Eddie looked at him anxiously. "But they're not still—"

"No." Richie shook his head. "We would have sensed it. Still." He jerked his chin at Dorothea's door, tightly shut without a wisp of light peeking from underneath. "She might have some questions to answer if the Clave hears she's entertaining demons.

"I doubt the Clave will be too pleased about any of this," said Ben. "On balance, she'll probably come out of it better than we do."

"They won't c-care as long as we get the Cup in the e-end." Bill was glancing around, blue eyes taking in the sizeable foyer, the curved staircase leading upstairs, the stains on the walls. "Especially if w-we slaughter a few Forsaken w-while we do it."

Richie shook his head. "They're in the upstairs apartment. My guess is that they won't bother us unless we try to get in."

Eddie glanced involuntarily at Richie, who gave him a sideways smile. *Go ahead*, said his eyes.

Eddie moved across the foyer toward Dorothea's door, stepping carefully. With the skylight blackened with dirt and the entryway lightbulb still out, the only illumination came from Richie's witchlight. The air was hot and close, and the shadows seemed to rise up before him like magically fast-growing plants in a nightmare forest. He reached up to knock on Dorothea's door, once lightly and then again with more force.

It swung open, spilling a great wash of golden light into the foyer. Dorothea stood there, massive and imposing in swaths of green and orange. Today her turban was neon yellow, adorned with a stuffed canary and rickrack trim. Chandelier earrings bobbed against her hair, and her big feet were bare.

Eddie was surprised—he'd never seen Dorothea barefoot before, or wearing anything other than her faded carpet slippers. Her toenails were a pale, and very tasteful, shell pink.

"Eddie!" she exclaimed, and swept Eddie into an overwhelming embrace. For a moment Eddie struggled, embroiled in a sea of perfumed flesh, swaths of velvet, and the tasseled ends of Dorothea's shawl. "Good Lord," said the witch, shaking her head until her earrings swung like wind chimes in a storm. "The last time I saw you, you were disappearing through my Portal. Where'd you end up?"

"Williamsburg," said Eddie, catching her breath.

Dorothea's eyebrows shot skyward. "And they say there's no convenient public transportation in Brooklyn." She swung the door open and gestured for them to come in.

The place looked unchanged from the last time Eddie had seen it: There were the same tarot cards and crystal ball scattered on the table. His fingers itched for the cards, itched to snatch them up and see what might lie hidden inside their slickly painted surfaces.

Dorothea sank gratefully into an armchair and regarded the Shadowhunters and Beverly with a stare as beady as the eyes of the stuffed canary on her hat. Scented candles burned in dishes on either side of the table, which did little to dispel the thick stench pervading every inch of the house. "I take it you haven't located your mother?"

she asked Eddie.

Eddie shook her head. "No. But I know who took her."

Dorothea's eyes darted past Eddie to Bill and Ben, who were examining the Hand of Fate on the wall. Richie, looking supremely unconcerned in his role of bodyguard, lounged against a chair arm. Beverly was just looking around in curiosity. Satisfied that none of her belongings were being destroyed, Dorothea returned her gaze to Eddie. "Was it—"

"Pennywise," Eddie confirmed. "Yes."

Dorothea sighed. "I feared as much." She settled back against the cushions. "Do you know what he wants with her?"

"I know she was married to him—"

The witch grunted. "Love gone wrong. The worst."

Richie made a soft, almost inaudible noise at that—a chuckle. Dorothea's ears pricked like a cat's. "What's so funny, boy?"

"What would you know about it?" he said. "Love, I mean."

Dorothea folded her soft white hands in her lap. "More than you might think," she said. "Didn't I read your tea leaves, Shadowhunter? Have you fallen in love with the wrong person yet?"

Richie said, "Unfortunately, Lady of the Haven, my one true love remains myself."

Dorothea roared at that. "At least," she said, "you don't have to worry about rejection, Richard Tozier."

"Not necessarily. I turn myself down occasionally, just to keep it interesting."

Dorothea roared again. Eddie interrupted her. "You must be wondering why we're here, Madame Dorothea."

Dorothea subsided. "Please," she said, "feel free to give me my proper

title, as the boy did. You may call me Lady. And I assumed," she added, "that you came for the pleasure of my company. Was I wrong?"

"I don't have time for the pleasure of anyone's company. I have to help my mother, and to do that there's something I need."

"And what's that?"

"It's something called the Mortal Cup," Eddie said, "and Pennywise thoughttho mother had it. That's why he took her."

Dorothea looked well and truly astonished. "The Cup of the Angel?" she said, disbelief coloring her voice. "Raziel's Cup, in which he mixed the blood of angels and the blood of men and gave of this mixture to a man to drink, and created the first Shadowhunter?"

"That would be the one," said Richie, a little dryness in his tone.

"Why on earth would he think she had it?" Dorothea demanded. "Sonia, of all people?" Realization dawned on her face before Eddie could speak. "Because she wasn't Sonia Kaspbrak at all, of course," she said. "She was Sonia Henderson, his wife. The one everyone thought had died. She took the Cup and fled, didn't she?"

Something flickered in the back of the witch's eyes then, but she lowered her lids so quickly that Eddie thought he might have imagined it. "So," Dorothea said, "do you know what you're going to do now? Wherever she's hidden it, it can't be easy to find—if you even want it found. Pennywise could do terrible things with his hands on that Cup."

"I want it found," said Eddie. "We want to—"

Richie cut him off smoothly. "We know where it is," he said. "It's only a matter of retrieving it."

Dorothea's eyes widened. "Well, where is it?"

"Here," said Richie, in a tone so smug that Bill and Ben wandered over from their perusal of the bookcase to see what was going on.

"Here? You mean you have it with you?"

"Not exactly, dear Lady," said Richie, who was, Eddie felt, enjoying himself in a truly appalling manner. "I meant that *you* have it."

Dorothea's mouth snapped shut. "That's not funny," she said, so sharply that Eddie became worried that this was all going terribly wrong. Why did Richie always have to antagonize everyone?

"You do have it," Eddie interrupted hurriedly, "but not—"

Dorothea rose from the armchair to her full, magnificent height, and glowered down at them. "You are mistaken," she said coldly. "Both in imagining that I have the Cup, and in daring to come here and call me a liar."

Bill's hand went to his featherstaff. "Oh, boy," he said under his breath.

Baffled, Eddie shook his head. "No," he said quickly, "I'm not calling you a liar, I promise. I'm saying the Cup is here, *but you never knew it.*"

Madame Dorothea stared at him. Her eyes, nearly hidden in the folds of her face, were hard as marbles. "Explain yourself," she said.

"I'm saying my mother hid it here," said Eddie. "Years ago. She never told you because she didn't want to involve you."

"So she gave it to you disguised," Richie explained, "in the form of a gift."

Dorothea looked at him blankly.

Doesn't she remember? Eddie thought, puzzled. "The tarot deck," he said. "The cards she painted for you."

The witch's gaze went to the cards, lying in their silk wrappings on the table. "The cards?" As her gaze widened, Eddie stepped to the table and picked up the deck. They were warm to the touch, almost slippery. Now, as he had not been able to before, she felt the power from the runes painted on their backs pulsing through the tips of her

fingers. He found the Ace of Cups by touch and pulled it out, setting the rest of the cards back down on the table.

“Here it is,” he said.

They were all looking at Eddie, expectant, perfectly still. Slowly he turned the card over and looked again at his mother’s artwork: the slim painted hand, its fingers wrapped around the gold stem of the Mortal Cup.

“Richie,” he said. “Give me your stele.”

He pressed it, warm and alive-feeling, into Eddie’s palm. Eddie turned the card over and traced over the runes painted on its back—a twist here and a line there and they meant something entirely different. When he turned the card back over, the picture had subtly changed: The fingers had released their grip on the Cup’s stem, and the hand seemed almost to be offering the Cup to him as if to say, *Here, take it.*

He slid the stele into his pocket. Then, though the painted square was no bigger than her hand, he reached into it as if through a wide gap. His hand wrapped around the base of the Cup—her fingers closed on it—and as he drew his hand back, the Cup gripped firmly in it, he thought he heard the smallest of sighs before the card, now blank and empty, turned to ash that sifted away between his fingers to the carpeted floor.

Eddie wasn’t sure what he’d expected— exclamation of delight, perhaps a smattering of applause. Instead there was silence, broken only when Richie said, “Somehow, I thought it would be bigger.”

24. Abbadon

Eddie looked at the Cup in his hand. It was the size, perhaps, of an ordinary wineglass, only much heavier. Power thrummed through it, like blood through living veins. "It's a perfectly nice size," Eddie said indignantly.

"Oh, it's big enough," Richie said patronizingly, "but somehow I was expecting something ... you know." He gestured with his hands, indicating something roughly the size of a house cat.

"It's the Mortal Cup, Richie, not the Mortal Toilet Bowl," said Ben. "Are we done now? Can we go?"

Dorothea had her head cocked to one side, her beady eyes bright and interested. "But it's damaged!" she exclaimed. "How did that happen?"

"Damaged?" Eddie looked at the Cup in bewilderment. It looked fine to him.

"Here," said the witch, "let me show you," and she took a step toward Eddie, holding her long red-nailed hands out for the Cup. Eddie, without knowing why, shrank back. Suddenly Richie was between them, his hand hovering near the sword at his waist.

"No offense," he said calmly, "but nobody touches the Mortal Cup except us."

Dorothea looked at him for a moment, and that same strange blankness returned to her eyes. "Now," she said, "let's not be hasty. Pennywise would be displeased if anything were to happen to the Cup."

With a soft snick, the sword at Richie's waist came free. The point hovered just below Dorothea's chin. Richie's look was steady. "I don't know what this is about," he said. "But we're leaving."

The old woman's eyes gleamed. "Of course, Shadowhunter," she said, backing up to the curtained wall. "Would you like to use the Portal?"

The point of Richie's sword wavered as he stared in momentary confusion. Then Eddie saw his jaw tighten. "Don't touch that—"

Dorothea chuckled, and quick as a flash she jerked down the curtains hanging along the wall. They fell with a sound of soft collapse. The Portal behind them was open.

Eddie heard Bill, behind him, suck in his breath. "What is that?" Eddie had caught only a glimpse of what was visible through the door—red roiling clouds shot through with black lightning, and a terrible dark, rushing shape that hurtled toward them—when Richie shouted for them to get down. He dropped to the floor, yanking Eddie down with him.

Flat on his stomach on the carpet, Eddie lifted his head in time to see the rushing dark thing strike Madame Dorothea, who screamed, thrusting her arms upward. Rather than knocking her down, the dark thing wrapped her like a shroud, its blackness seeming to seep into her like ink sinking into paper. Her back humped monstrously, her whole shape elongating as she rose and rose into the air, her bulk stretching and re-forming. A sharp rattle of objects striking the floor made Eddie look down: They were Dorothea's bracelets, twisted and broken. Scattered among the jewels were what looked like small white stones. It took Eddie a moment to realize that they were teeth.

Beside him, Richie whispered something. It sounded like an exclamation of disbelief. Next to him, Bill in a choked voice said, "But you s-said there wasn't much demonic activity—you said the l-levels were low!"

"They were low," Richie growled.

"Your v-version of low must be different from mine!" Bill shouted, as the thing that had once been Dorothea howled and twisted. It seemed to be spreading, humped and knobbled and grotesquely misshapen—

Eddie tore his eyes away as Richie stood. Ben and Bill stumbled to their feet, gripping their weapons. Beverly hid behind Ben.

"Move!" Richie shoved Eddie toward the apartment door. When he tried to look back over his shoulder, he saw only a thickly swirling

grayness, like storm clouds, a dark shape at its center ...

The five of them burst out into the foyer, Ben in the lead. He raced toward the front door, tried it, and turned with a stricken face. "It's resistant. Must be a spell—"

Richie swore and fumbled in his jacket. "Where the hell is my stele?"

"Beverly, do something!" Eddie shouted.

Beverly was sweating and Eddie could hear her heartbeats. "I—I don't know..."

"Just try!" Ben said putting a hand on her shoulder.

Beverly raised her hand, pointing at the door, but nothing happened. "This is useless, I don't—"

A noise like thunder exploded through the room. The floor heaved under Eddie's feet. He stumbled and nearly fell, catching at the banister for support. When he looked up, he saw a gaping new hole in the wall separating the foyer from Dorothea's apartment, lined all around its ragged edges with wood and plaster rubble, through which *something* was climbing—almost oozing—

"Bill!" It was Richie, shouting: Bill was standing in front of the hole, white-faced and horrified-looking. Swearing, Richie ran up and grabbed him, dragging him back just as the oozing thing pulled itself free of the wall and into the foyer.

Eddie heard his breath catch. The creature's flesh was livid and bruised-looking. Through the seeping skin, bones protruded—not new white bones, but bones that looked as if they had been in the earth a thousand years, black and cracked and filthy. Its fingers were stripped and skeletal, its thin-fleshed arms pocked with dripping black sores through which more yellowing bone was visible. Its face was a skull, its nose and eyes caved-in holes. Its taloned fingers brushed the floor. Tangled around its wrists and shoulders were bright swatches of cloth: all that remained of Madame Dorothea's silk scarves and turban. It was at least nine feet tall.

It looked down at the five teenagers with empty eye sockets. "Give

me,” it said, in a voice like the wind blowing trash across empty pavement, “the Mortal Cup. Give it to me, and I will let you live.”

Panicked, Eddie stared at the others. Ben looked as if the sight of the thing had hit him like a punch to the stomach. Beverly was almost crying of fear. Bill was motionless. It was Richie, as always, who spoke. “What are you?” he asked, voice steady, though he looked more rattled than Eddie had ever seen him.

The thing inclined its head. “I am Abbadon. I am the Demon of the Abyss. Mine are the empty places between the worlds. Mine is the wind and the howling darkness. I am as unlike those mewling things you call demons as an eagle is unlike a fly. You cannot hope to defeat me. Give me the Cup or die.”

Ben's whip trembled. “It's a Greater Demon,” he said. “Richie, if we —”

“What about Dorothea?” Eddie's voice came shrilly out of his mouth before he could stop it. “What happened to her?”

The demon's empty eyes swung to regard him. “She was a vessel only,” it said. “She opened the Portal and I took possession of her. Her death was swift.” Its gaze moved to the Cup in his hand. “Yours will not be.”

It began to move toward him. Richie blocked its way, the glittering sword in one hand, a seraph blade appearing in the other. Bill was watching him, his expression sick with horror.

“By the Angel,” Richie said, looking the demon up and down. “I knew Greater Demons were meant to be ugly, but no one ever warned me about the smell.”

Abbadon opened its mouth and hissed. Inside its mouth were two rows of jagged glass-sharp teeth.

“I'm not so sure about this wind and howling darkness business,” Richie went on, “smells more like landfill to me. You sure you're not from Staten Island?”

The demon leaped at him. Richie whipped his blades up and outward

with an almost frightening speed; both sank into the fleshiest part of the demon, its abdomen. It howled and struck at him, knocking him aside the way a cat might bat aside a kitten. Richie rolled and got to his feet, but Eddie could see from the way he was holding his arm that he'd been hurt.

That was enough for Ben. Darting forward, he lashed out at the demon with his whip. It struck the demon's gray hide, and a red weal appeared, welling blood. Abbadon ignored him, moving toward Richie.

With his uninjured hand, Richie drew out a second seraph blade. He whispered to it and it sprang free, bright and gleaming. He raised it as the demon loomed up before him; he looked impossibly small in front of it, a child dwarfed by a monster. And he was grinning, even as the demon reached for him. Ben, screaming, lashed at it, sending blood in a thick spray across the floor—

The demon struck, its razored hand lashing down at Richie. Richie staggered back, but he was unharmed. Something had thrown itself between him and the demon, a slim black shadow with a gleaming blade in its hand. Bill. The demon shrieked—Bill's featherstaff had pierced its skin. With a snarl it struck again, bone-talons catching Bill a vicious blow that lifted him off his feet and hurled him against the far wall. He struck with a sickening crunch and slid to the floor.

Ben screamed his brother's name. Bill didn't move. Lowering the whip, Ben started to run to him. The demon, turning, caught him a backhanded blow that sent him spinning to the ground. Coughing blood, Ben started to get to his feet; Abbadon knocked him down again, and this time he lay still.

The demon moved toward Eddie.

But then, Beverly was in front of him, and she raised both of her hands before purple lighting came out of them, it sounded like a quiet explosion, so bright that Eddie had to cover his eyes with his hands. Beverly's magic was hitting Abbadon in its face, she was screaming, there was blood coming out of her nose. Abbadon's face was burning, Eddie could almost feel it dying. But the magic stopped and Beverly passed out onto the floor.

Richie stood frozen, staring at Bill's crumpled body like someone caught in a dream. Eddie screamed as Abbadon neared him. He began to back up the stairs, stumbling on the broken steps. The stele burned against his skin. If only he had a weapon, anything—

Ben had clawed his way into a sitting position. Touching his bloody forehead, he screamed at Richie. Eddie heard his own name in Ben's screams and saw Richie, blinking as if slapped awake, spin toward Eddie.

He began to run. The demon was close enough now that Eddie could see the black sores on its skin, could see that there were things crawling inside them. It reached for him—

But Richie was there, knocking Abbadon's hand aside. He flung the seraph blade at the demon; it stuck in the creature's chest, next to the two blades already there. The demon snarled as if the blades were no more than an annoyance.

"Shadowhunter," it snarled. "I shall take pleasure in killing you, in hearing your bones crunch as your friend's did—"

Springing onto the banister, Richie flung himself at Abbadon. The force of the jump knocked the demon backward; it staggered, Richie clinging to its back. He seized a seraph blade out of its chest, sending up a spray of ichor, and brought the blade down, again and again, into the demon's back, its shoulders running with black fluid.

Snarling, Abbadon backed toward the wall. Richie had to drop or be crushed. He fell to the ground, landed lightly, and raised the blade again. But Abbadon was too swift for him; its hand lashed out, knocking Richie into the stairs. Richie went down, a circle of talons at his throat.

"Tell them to give me the Cup," Abbadon snarled, talons hovering just above Richie's skin. "Tell them to give it to me and I will let them live."

Richie swallowed. "Eddie—"

But Eddie would never know what he would have said, because at

that moment the front door flew open. For a moment all Eddie saw was brightness. Then, blinking away the fiery afterimage, he saw Stan standing in the open doorway. *Stan*. Eddie had forgotten he was outside, had almost forgotten he existed.

He saw Eddie, crouched on the stairs, and his gaze moved past him and over Abbadon and Richie. He reached back over his shoulder. He was holding Bill's bow, Eddie realized, and the quiver was strapped across his back. He drew an arrow from it, fitted it to the string, and lifted the bow expertly, as if he'd done the same thing a hundred times before.

The arrow sprang free. It made a hot buzzing sound, like a huge bumblebee, as it shot over Abbadon's head, plunged toward the roof

And shattered the skylight. Dirty black glass fell like rain, and through the broken pane streamed sunlight, quantities of sunlight, great golden bars of it stabbing downward and flooding the foyer with light.

Abbadon screamed and staggered back, shielding its misshapen head with its hands. Richie put a hand to his unharmed throat, staring in disbelief as the demon crumpled, howling, to the floor. Eddie half-expected it to burst into flames, but instead it began to fold in on itself. Its legs collapsed toward its torso, its skull crumpling like burning paper, and within the span of a minute it had vanished entirely, leaving only scorch marks behind.

Stan lowered the bow. He was blinking, his mouth slightly open. He looked as astonished as Eddie felt.

Richie lay on the stairs where the demon had thrown him. He was struggling to sit up as Eddie slid down the steps and fell to his knees beside him. "Richie—"

"I'm all right." He sat up, wiping blood from his mouth. He coughed and spit red. "Bill—"

"Beverly!" Stan saw Beverly on the floor and shook her shoulder, she woke up immediately, coughing. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "My head hurts."

"Your stele," Eddie said to Richie, reaching for his pocket. "Do you need it to fix yourself?"

Richie looked at him. The sunlight pouring through the shattered skylight lit his face. He looked as if he were holding himself back from something with a terrible effort. "I'm all right," he said again, and pushed Eddie aside, none too gently. He got to his feet, staggered, and nearly fell—the first ungraceful thing he'd ever seen him do. "Bill?"

Eddie watched him as he limped across the foyer toward his unconscious friend. Then Eddie zipped the Mortal Cup into the pocket of his hoodie and got to his feet. Ben had crawled to his brother's side and was cradling Bill's head in his lap, stroking his hair. His chest rose and fell—slowly, but he was breathing. Stan, leaning against the wall watching them, looked utterly drained. Eddie squeezed his hand. "Thank you," he whispered. "That was amazing."

"Don't thank me," Stan said, "thank the archery program at B'nai B'rith summer camp."

"Stan, I don't—"

"Eddie!" It was Richie, calling him. "Bring my stele."

Stan let him go reluctantly. Eddie knelt down next to the Shadowhunters, the Mortal Cup thumping heavily against her side. Bill's face was white, freckled with drops of blood, his eyes unnaturally blue. His grip on Richie's wrist left bloody smears. "Did I ..." he started, there was something in his look Eddie hadn't expected. Triumph. "Di-Did I kill it?"

Richie's face twisted painfully. "You—"

"Yes," Stan said, from behind. "It's dead."

Bill looked at him and laughed. Blood bubbled up in his mouth. Richie pulled his wrist free, touched his fingers to either side of Bill's face. "Don't," he said. "Hold still, just hold still."

Bill closed his eyes. "Do what you have to," he whispered.

Ben held his stele out to Richie. "Take it."

He nodded, and drew the tip of the stele down the front of Bill's shirt. The material parted as if he'd sliced it with a knife. Ben watched him through frantic eyes as he yanked the shirt open, leaving Bill's chest bare. His skin was very white, marked here and there with old translucent scars. There were other injuries there too: a darkening lattice of claw marks, each hole red and oozing. Jaw set, Richie set the stele to Bill's skin, moving it back and forth with the ease of long practice. But there was something wrong. Even as he drew the healing marks, they seemed to vanish as if he were writing on water.

Richie threw the stele aside. "Damn it."

Ben's voice was shrill. "What's going on?"

"It cut him with its talons," Richie said. "There's demon poison in him. The Marks can't work." He touched Bill's face again, gently. "Bill," he said. "Can you hear me?"

Bill didn't move. The shadows under his eyes looked blue and as dark as bruises. If it weren't for his breathing, Eddie would have thought he was already dead.

Ben bent his head, his arms were around Bill. "Maybe," Ben whispered, "we could—"

"Take him to the hospital." It was Stan, standing over them, the bow dangling in his hand. "I'll help you carry him to the van. There's Methodist down on Seventh Avenue—"

"No hospitals," said Ben. "We need to get him to the Institute."

"But—"

"They won't know how to treat him in a hospital," said Richie. "He's been cut by a Greater Demon. No mundane doctor would know how to heal those wounds."

Stan nodded. "All right. Let's get him to the car."

In a stroke of good luck, the van hadn't been towed. Ben draped a dirty blanket across the backseat and they laid Bill down across it, his head on Ben's lap. Richie crouched down on the floor beside his friend. His shirt was stained dark across the sleeves and chest with blood, demon and human. When he looked at Stan, Eddie saw that all the gold seemed washed out of his eyes by something Eddie had never seen in them before. Panic.

"Drive fast, mundane," he said. "Drive like hell was following you."

Stan drove.

They careened down Flatbush and rocketed onto the bridge, keeping pace with the Q train as it roared over the blue water. The sun was painfully bright in Eddie's eyes, striking hot sparks off the river. He clutched at his seat as Sitan took the curving ramp off the bridge at fifty miles an hour.

Eddie thought about Bill. The way he'd thrown himself at Abbadon, the look of triumph on his face. When Eddie turned his head now, she saw Ben almost crying, his hands caressing Bill's hair. Eddie thought of the story with the dead falcon. *To love is to destroy.*

Eddie turned back around, a hard lump lodged in the back of his throat. Ben was visible in the badly angled rearview mirror, wrapping the blanket around Bill's throat. He looked up and met Eddie's eyes. "How much farther?"

"Maybe ten minutes. Stan's driving as fast as he can."

"I know," Ben said. "Stan—what you did, that was incredible. You moved so fast. I wouldn't have thought a mundane could have thought of something like that."

Stan didn't seem fazed by praise from such an unexpected quarter; his eyes were on the road. "You mean shooting out the skylight? It hit me after you guys went inside. I was thinking about the skylight and how you'd said demons couldn't stand direct sun. So, actually, it took me a while to act on it. Don't feel bad," he added, "you can't

even see that skylight unless you know it's there."

I knew it was there, Eddie thought. I should have acted on it. Even if I didn't have a bow and arrow like Stan, I could have thrown something at it or told Richie about it. He felt stupid and useless and thick, as though his head were full of cotton. The truth was that he'd been frightened. Too frightened to think straight. He felt a bright surge of shame that burst behind his eyelids like a small sun.

Richie spoke then. "It was well done," he said.

Stan's eyes narrowed. "So, if you don't mind telling me—that thing, the demon—where did it come from?"

"It was Madame Dorothea," said Eddie. "I mean, it was sort of her."

"She was never exactly a pinup, but I don't remember her looking *that* bad."

"I think she was possessed," said Beverly slowly.

Eddie was trying to piece it together in his own mind. "She wanted me to give her the Cup. Then she opened the Portal ..."

"It was clever," said Richie. "The demon possessed her, then hid the majority of its ethereal form just outside the Portal, where the Sensor wouldn't register it. So we went in expecting to fight a few Forsaken. Instead we found ourselves facing a Greater Demon. Abbadon—one of the Ancients. The Lord of the Fallen."

"Well, it looks like the Fallen will just have to learn to get along without him from now on," said Stan, turning onto the street.

"He's not dead," Ben said. "Hardly anyone's ever killed a Greater Demon. You have to kill them in their physical and ethereal forms before they'll die. We just scared him off."

Oh." Stan looked disappointed. "What about Madame Dorothea? Will she be all right now that—"

He broke off, because Bill had begun to choke, his breath rattling in his chest. Richie swore under his breath with vicious precision. "*Why*

aren't we there yet?"

"We are here. I just don't want to crash into a wall." As Stan pulled up carefully at the corner, Eddie saw that the door of the Institute was open, Keene standing framed in the arch. The van jerked to a halt and Richie leaped out, reaching back to lift Bill as if he weighed no more than a child. Ben followed him up the walk, holding his brother's bloody featherstaff. The Institute door slammed shut behind them.

Tiredness washing over her, Eddie looked at Stan. "I'm sorry. I don't know how you're going to explain all the blood to Belch."

"Screw Belch," he said with conviction. "Are you all right?"

"Not a scratch. Everyone else got hurt, but not me."

"It's their job, Eddie," Beverly said gently. "Fighting demons—it's what they do. Not what you do."

"What do I do, guys?" Eddie asked. "*What do I do?*"

"Well—you got the Cup," Beverly said. "Didn't you?"

Eddie nodded, and tapped his pocket. "Yes."

Stan looked relieved. "I almost didn't want to ask," he said. "That's good, right?"

"It is," he said. He thought of his mother, and his hand tightened on the Cup. "I know it is."

25. Betrayal

Mews met Eddie at the top of the stairs, yowling like a foghorn, and led him to the infirmary. The double doors were open, and through them he could see Bill's still figure, motionless in one of the beds. Keene was bent over him; Beverly was biting her nails. Ben was just staring at Bill.

Richie was not with them. He was not with them because he was standing outside the infirmary, leaning against the wall, his bare, bloody hands curled at his sides. When Eddie stopped in front of him, his lids flew open, and Eddie saw that the pupils of his eyes were dilated, all the gold swallowed up in black.

"How is he?" Eddie asked, as gently as he could.

"He's lost a lot of blood. Demon poisonings are common, but since it was a Greater Demon, Keene isn't sure if the antidotes he usually employs will be viable."

Eddie reached to touch Richie's arm. "Richie—"

He flinched away. "Don't."

Eddie sucked in his breath. "I never would have wanted anything to happen to Bill. I'm so sorry."

He looked at Eddie as if seeing him there for the first time. "It's not your fault," he said. "It's mine."

"Yours? Richie, no it isn't—"

"Oh, but it is," he said, his voice as fragile as a sliver of ice. "*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

"What does that mean?"

"My fault," he said. "'My own fault, my most grievous fault.' It's Latin. Part of the Mass."

"I thought you didn't believe in religion."

"I may not believe in sin," he said, "but I do feel guilt. We Shadowhunters live by a code, and that code isn't flexible. Honor, fault, penance, those are real to us, and they have nothing to do with religion and everything to do with who we are. This is who I am, Eddie," he said desperately. "I am one of the Clave. It's in my blood and bones. So tell me, if you're so sure this wasn't my fault, why is it that the first thought in my mind when I saw Abbadon wasn't for my fellow warriors but for you?" His other hand came up; he was holding Eddie's face, prisoned between his palms. "I know—I *knew*—Bill wasn't acting like himself. I knew something was wrong. But all I could think about was you ..."

Richie bent his head forward, so their foreheads touched. Eddie could feel his breath stir his eyelashes. Eddie closed his eyes, letting the nearness of Richie wash over him like a tide. "If he dies, it will be like I killed him," he said. "I let my father die, and now I've killed my brother."

"That's not true," Eddie whispered.

"Yes, it is." They were close enough to kiss. And still he held Eddie tightly, "Eds," he said. "What's happening to me?"

Eddie searched his mind for an answer—and heard someone clear his throat. Eddie opened his eyes. Keene stood by the infirmary door, his neat suit stained with patches of rust. "I have done what I can. He is sedated, not in pain, but ..." He shook his head. "I must contact the Silent Brothers. This is beyond my abilities."

Richie drew slowly away from Eddie. "How long will it take them to get here?"

"I don't know." Keene started down the corridor, shaking his head. "I'll send Gard immediately, but the Brothers come at their own discretion."

"But for *this*—" Even Richie was scrambling to keep up with Keene's long strides; Eddie had fallen hopelessly behind the two of them and had to strain his ear to hear what he was saying. "He might die otherwise."

"He might," was all Keene said in response.

The library was dark and smelled like rain: One of the windows had been left open, and a puddle of water had collected under the curtains. Ben was there, looking at the window, Richie had returned to see Bill. Gard bounced on his perch as Keene strode over to him, pausing only to light the lamp on his desk. "It is a pity," Keene said, reaching for paper and a fountain pen, "that you did not retrieve the Cup. It would, I think, bring some comfort to Bill and certainly to his —"

"But I *did* retrieve the Cup," said Eddie, amazed. "Didn't you tell him, Ben?"

Ben was blinking, though whether it was because of surprise or the sudden light, Eddie couldn't tell. "There wasn't time—I was bringing Bill upstairs ..."

Keene had gone very still, the pen motionless between his fingers. "*You have the Cup?*"

"Yes." Eddie drew the Cup out of his pocket: It was still cold, as if contact with his body could not warm the metal. The rubies winked like red eyes. "I have it here."

The pen slipped from Keene's hand entirely and struck the floor at his feet. The lamplight, thrown upward, was not kind to his ravaged face: It showed every etched line of harshness and worry and despair. "That is the Angel's Cup?"

"The one," Ben said. "It was—"

He set the paper down on the desk and moved toward Ben, catching his student by the shoulders. "Ben Hanscom, do you know what you've done?"

Ben looked up at Keene, surprised. Eddie noted the contrast: the ravaged face of the older man and the boy's unlined one, the pale locks of hair falling into Ben's eyes making him look even younger. "I'm not sure what you mean," Ben said.

Keene's breath hissed out through his teeth. "You look so much like him."

"Like who?" said Ben in astonishment; he had clearly never heard Keene talk this way before.

"Like your father," Keene said, and raised his eyes to where Gard, black wings stirring the humid air, hovered just overhead.

Keene narrowed his eyes. "*Hortus*," he said, and with an unearthly caw the bird dived straight for Eddie's face, claws outstretched.

Eddie heard Ben shout, and then the world was whirling feathers and slashing beak and claws. Bright pain bloomed along his cheek and he shrieked, instinctively throwing his hands up to cover his face.

He felt the Mortal Cup yanked from his grasp. "No!" he cried, grabbing for it. An agonizing pain shot up his arm. Eddie slipped and fell, striking his knees painfully against the hard floor. Claws raked his forehead.

"That's enough, Gard," said Keene in his quiet voice.

Obediently the bird spun away from Eddie. Gagging, he blinked blood out of his eyes. His face felt shredded.

Keene had not moved; he stood where he was, holding the Mortal Cup. Hugo was circling him in wide, agitated rounds, cawing softly. And Ben—Ben lay on the floor at Keene's feet, very still, as if he had fallen suddenly asleep.

All other thoughts were driven from Eddie's mind. "Ben!" Speaking hurt—the pain in his cheek was startling and he could taste blood in his mouth. Ben didn't move.

"He's not hurt," said Keene. Eddie started to his feet, meaning to fling himself at him—then reeled back as he struck something invisible but as hard and strong as glass. Infuriated, Eddie struck against the air with his fist.

"Keene!" he shouted. He kicked out, nearly bruising his feet on the same invisible wall. "Don't be stupid. When the Clave finds out what

you've done—”

“I’ll be long gone by then,” he said, kneeling over Ben.

“But—” A shock ran through Eddie, a jolt of electric realization. “You never sent a message to the Clave, did you? That’s why you were so weird when I asked you about it. You wanted the Cup for yourself.”

“Not,” said Keene, “for myself.”

Eddie’s throat was dry as dust. “You work for Pennywise,” he whispered.

“I do not work *for* Pennywise,” said Keene. He lifted Ben’s hand and drew something from it. It was the engraved ring. Keene slipped it onto his own finger. “But I am Pennywise’s man, it is true.”

With a swift movement he twisted the ring three times around his finger. For a moment nothing happened; then Eddie heard the sound of a door opening and turned instinctively to see who was coming into the library. When he turned back, he saw that the air beside Keene was shimmering, like the surface of a lake seen from a distance. The shimmering wall of air parted like a silver curtain, and then a tall man was standing next to Keene, as if he had coalesced out of the humid air.

“Keene, he said. “You have the Cup?”

Keene raised the Cup in his hands, but said nothing. He appeared paralyzed, whether with fear or astonishment, it was impossible to tell. He had always seemed tall to Eddie, but now he looked hunched and small. “My Lord Pennywise” he said, finally. “I had not expected you so quickly.”

Pennywise. He bore little resemblance to the handsome boy in the photograph, though his eyes were still black. His face was not what Eddie had expected: It was a restrained, closed, interior face, the face of a priest, with sorrowful eyes. Creeping out beneath the black cuffs of his tailored suit were the ridged white scars that spoke of years of the stele. “I told you I would come to you through a Portal,” he said. His voice was resonant, and strangely familiar. “Didn’t you believe

me?"

"Yes. It's just—I thought you'd send Pangborn or Hagarty, not come yourself."

"You think I would send them to collect the Cup? I am not a fool. I know its lure." Pennywise held out his hand, and Eddie saw, gleaming on his finger, a ring that was the twin of Ben's. "Give it to me."

But Keene held the Cup fast. "I want what you promised first."

"First? You don't trust me, Keene?" Pennywise smiled, a smile not without humor in it. "I'll do as you asked. A bargain is a bargain. Though I must say I was astonished to get your message. I wouldn't have thought you'd mind a life of hidden contemplation, so to speak. You never were much for the battlefield."

"You don't know what it's like," Keene said, letting out his breath with a hissing gasp. "Being afraid all the time—"

"That's true, I don't," Pennywise's voice was as sorrowful as his eyes, as if he pitied Keene. But there was dislike in his eyes too, a trace of scorn. "If you did not intend to give the Cup to me," he said, "you should not have summoned me here."

Keene's face worked. "It is not easy to betray what you believe in—those who trust you."

"Do you mean the Denbroughs, or their children?"

"Both," said Keene.

"Ah, the Denbroughs" Pennywise reached out, and with a hand caressed the brass globe that stood on the desk, his long fingers tracing the outlines of continents and seas. "But what do you owe them, really? Yours is the punishment that should have been theirs. If they had not had such high connections in the Clave, they would have been cursed along with you. As it is, they are free to come and go, to walk in the sunlight like ordinary men. They are free to go home." His voice as he said "home" thrilled with all the meaning of the word. His finger had stopped moving over the globe; Eddie was

sure he was touching the place where Derry would be.

Keene's eyes darted away. "They did what anyone would do."

"You would not have done it. I would not have done it. To let a friend suffer in my place? And surely it must engender some bitterness in you, Keene, to know that they so easily left this fate to you ..."

Keene's shoulders shook. "But it is not the children's fault. They have done nothing—"

"I never knew you to be so fond of children, Keene," Pennywise said, as if the idea entertained him.

The breath rattled in Keene's chest. "Ben—"

"You will not speak of Ben." For the first time Pennywise sounded angry. He glanced at the still figure on the floor. "He is bleeding," he observed. "Why?"

Keene held the Cup against his heart. His knuckles were white. "It's not his blood. He's unconscious, but not injured."

Pennywise raised his head with a pleasant smile. "I wonder," he said, "what he will think of you when he wakes. Betrayal is never pretty, but to betray a child—that's a double betrayal, don't you think?"

"You won't hurt him," whispered Keene. "You swore you wouldn't hurt him."

"I never did that," said Pennywise. "Come, now." He moved away from the desk, toward Keene, who flinched away like a small, trapped animal. Eddie could see his misery. "And what would you do if I said I did plan to hurt him? Would you fight me? Keep the Cup from me? Even if you could kill me, the Clave will never lift your curse. You'll hide here till you die, terrified to do so much as open a window too widely. What wouldn't you trade away, not to be afraid any longer? What wouldn't you give up, to go home again?"

"Tell me you won't hurt him, and I'll give it to you."

"No," said Pennywise, even more softly. "You'll give it to me anyway." And he reached out his hand.

Keene closed his eyes. For a moment his face was the face of one of the marble angels beneath the desk, pained and grave and crushed beneath a terrible weight. Then he swore, pathetically, under his breath, and held the Mortal Cup for Pennywise to take, though his hand shook like a leaf in a high wind.

He took the Cup, and eyed it thoughtfully. "I do believe you've dented the rim."

Keene said nothing. His face was gray. Pennywise bent down and gathered up Richie; as he lifted him up lightly, Eddie saw the impeccably cut jacket tighten over his arms and back, and realized that Pennywise was a deceptively massive man, with a torso like the trunk of an oak tree. Ben, limp in his arms, looked like a child by comparison.

"He'll be with his father soon," said Pennywise, looking down at Ben's white face. "Where he belongs."

Keene flinched. Pennywise turned away from him and walked back toward the shimmering curtain of air that he had come through. He must have left the Portal door open behind him, Eddie realized. Looking at it was like looking at sunlight bouncing off the surface of a mirror.

Keene reached out an imploring hand. "Wait!" he cried. "What of your promise to me? You swore to end my curse."

"That is true," said Pennywise. He paused, and looked hard at Keene, who gasped and stepped back, his hand flying to his chest as if something had struck him in the heart. Black fluid seeped out around his splayed fingers and trickled to the floor. Keene lifted his scarred face to Pennywise. "Is it done?" he asked wildly. "The curse—it is lifted?"

"Yes," said Pennywise. "And may your bought freedom bring you joy." And with that he stepped through the curtain of glowing air. For a moment he himself seemed to shimmer, as if he stood

underwater. Then he vanished, taking Ben with him.

Keene, gasping, stared after him, his fists clenching and unclenching at his sides. His left hand was gloved with the wet dark fluid that had seeped from his chest. The look on his face was a mixture of exultation and self-loathing.

“Keene!” Eddie slammed his hand into the invisible wall between them. Pain shot up his arm, but it was nothing compared to the searing pain inside his chest. “Keene, let me out!”

Keene turned, shaking his head. “I can’t,” he said, using his immaculately folded handkerchief to rub at his stained hand. He sounded genuinely regretful. “You’ll only try to kill me.”

“I won’t,” he said. “I promise.”

“But you were not raised a Shadowhunter,” Keene said, “and your promises mean nothing.” The edge of his handkerchief was smoking now, as if he’d dipped it in acid, and his hand was no less blackened. Frowning, he abandoned the project.

“But, Keene,” he said desperately, “didn’t you hear him? He’s going to kill Ben.”

“He didn’t say that.” Keene was at the desk now, opening a drawer, taking out a piece of paper. He drew a pen from his pocket, tapping it sharply against the edge of the desk to make the ink flow. Eddie stared at him. Was he writing a *letter*?

“Keene,” he said carefully, “Pennywise said Ben would be with his father soon. Ben’s father is *dead*. What else could he have meant?”

Keene didn’t look up from the paper he was scribbling on. “It’s complicated. You wouldn’t understand.”

“I understand enough.” Eddie’s bitterness felt like it might burn through his tongue. “I understand that Ben trusted you and you traded him away to a man who hated his father and probably hates Ben, too, just because you’re too cowardly to live with a curse you deserved.”

Keene's head jerked up. "Is that what you think?"

"It's what I *know*."

He laid his pen down, shaking his head. He looked tired, and so old, so much older than Pennywise had looked, though they were the same age. "You only know bits and fragments, Edward. And you're better off that way." He folded the paper he'd been writing on into a neat square and tossed it into the fire, which flared up a bright acidic green before subsiding.

"What are you doing?" Eddie demanded.

"Sending a message." Keene turned away from the fire. He was standing close to him, separated only by the invisible wall. Eddie pressed his fingers against it, wishing he could dig them into Keene's eyes—though they were as sad as Pennwise's had been angry. "You are young," he said. "The past is nothing to you, not even another country as it is to the old, or a nightmare as it is to the guilty. The Clave laid this curse on me because I aided Pennywise But I was hardly the only member of the Circle to serve him—were the Denbroughs not as guilty as I was? Were not the Toziers? Or the Hanscoms?" I was the only one cursed to live out my life without being able to set so much as a foot outdoors, not so much as a hand through the window."

"That's not my fault," said Eddie. "It's not Richie's fault. Or Ben's. Why punish him for what the Clave did? I can understand giving Pennywise the Cup, but Ben? He'll kill Ben—"

"Ah," he said, "the moral absolutism of the young, which allows for no concessions. Can't you see, Eddie, that in my own way I'm trying to be a good man?"

Eddie shook his head. "It doesn't work that way. The good things you do don't cancel out the bad ones. But—" He bit his lip. "If you told me where Pennywise was—"

"No." He breathed the word. "It is said that the Nephilim are the children of men and angels. All that this angelic heritage has given to us is a longer distance to fall." He touched the invisible surface of the

wall with his fingertips. "You were not raised as one of us. You have no part of this life of scars and killing. You can still get away. Leave the Institute, Eddie, as soon as you can. Leave, and never come back."

He shook his head. "I can't," he said. "I can't do that."

"Then you have my condolences," Keene said, and walked out of the room.

The door closed behind Keene, leaving Eddie in silence. There was only his own harsh breathing and the scrabble of his fingertips against the ungiving transparent barrier between him and the door. He did exactly what he'd told himself he wouldn't do, and flung himself against it, again and again, until he was exhausted and his sides ached. Then he sank to the floor and tried not to cry.

Somewhere on the other side of this barrier Bill was dying, while Richie waited for Keene to come and save him.

Somewhere beyond this room Ben was being shaken roughly awake by Pennywise. Somewhere his mother's chances were ebbing away, moment by moment, second by second. And he was trapped here, as useless and helpless as the child he was.

Eddie sat bolt upright then, remembering the moment at Madame Dorothea's when Richie had pressed the stele into his hand. Had he ever given it *back* to him? Holding his breath, Eddie felt in his left jacket pocket; it was empty. Slowly his hand crept into the right pocket, his sweaty fingers picking up lint and then skidding across something hard, smooth, and round—the stele.

He bounded to his feet, his heart pounding, and felt with his left hand for the invisible wall. Finding it, he braced himself, inching the tip of the stele forward with his other hand until it rested against the smooth, level air. Already an image was forming in his mind, like a fish rising up through cloudy water, the pattern of its scales growing clearer and clearer as it neared the surface. Slowly at first, and then more confidently, he moved the stele across the wall, leaving searingly bright ash-white lines hovering in the air before him.

Eddie felt when the rune was done, and lowered his hand, breathing hard. For a moment everything was motionless and silent and the rune hung like glowing neon, burning his eyes. Then came a sound like the loudest shattering he had ever heard, as if he were standing under a waterfall of stones listening to them crash to the ground all around him. The rune he had drawn turned black and sifted away like ash; the floor trembled under his feet; then it was over and he knew, without a doubt, that he was free.

Still holding the stele, he raced to the window and pushed the curtain aside. Twilight was falling and the streets below were bathed in a reddish-purple glow. Eddie caught a clear glimpse of Keene crossing a street, his gray head bobbing above the crowd.

Eddie dashed out of the library and down the stairs, pausing only to shove the stele back into his jacket pocket. He took the stairs running and hit the street with a stitch already forming in his side.

He wriggled around a Dumpster and into the mouth of the alley. The back of his throat felt like it was burning every time he breathed. Though it had been twilight on the street, here in the alley it was as dark as nightfall. He could just see Keene, standing at the far end of the alley, where it dead-ended into the back of a fast-food restaurant. Restaurant trash was piled outside: heaping bags of food, dirty paper plates, and plastic cutlery that crunched unpleasantly under his boots as he turned to look at Eddie. He remembered a poem he'd read in English class: *I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones.*

"You followed me," Keene said. "You shouldn't have."

"I'll leave you alone if you just tell me where Pennywise is."

"I can't do that," he said. "He'll know I told you, and my freedom will be as short as my life."

"It will be anyway when the Clave finds out that you gave the Mortal Cup to Pennywise," Eddie pointed out. "After tricking us into finding it for you. How can you live with yourself, knowing what he plans to do with it?"

He cut him off with a short laugh. "I fear Pennywise more than the Clave, and so would you, if you were wise," he said. "He would have found the Cup eventually, whether I helped him or not."

"And you don't care that he's going to use it to kill children?"

A spasm crossed his face as he took a step forward; Eddie saw something shine in his hand. "Does all this really matter to you this much?"

"I told you before," he said. "I can't just walk away."

"That's too bad," Keene said, and Eddie saw him raise his arm—and remembered suddenly Richie saying that Keene's weapon had been the *chakram*, the flying disk. Eddie ducked even before he saw the bright circle of metal spin singing toward his head; it passed, humming, inches from his face and embedded itself in the metal fire escape on his left.

Eddie looked up. Keene was gazing at him, the second metal disk held lightly in his right hand. "You can still run," he said.

Instinctively Eddie raised his hands, though logic told him the *chakram* would just slice them to pieces. "Keene—"

Something hurtled in front of Eddie, something big, gray-black, and alive. He heard Keene shout in horror. Stumbling backward, Eddie saw the thing more clearly as it paced between him and Keene. It was a wolf, six feet in length, with a jet-black coat shot through with a single stripe of gray.

Keene, the metal disk gripped in his hand, was white as a bone. "You," he breathed, and with a sense of distant astonishment Eddie realized he was talking to the wolf. "I thought that you had fled—"

The wolf's lips drew back from its teeth, and Eddie saw its lolling red tongue. There was hatred in its eyes as it looked at Keene, a pure and human hatred.

"Did you come for me, or for the boy?" said Keene. Sweat streamed from his temples, but his hand was steady.

The wolf paced toward him, growling low in its throat.

“There’s still time,” said Keene. “Pennywise would take you back—”

With a howl the wolf sprang. Keene cried out again, then there was a flash of silver, and a sickening noise as the *chakram* embedded itself in the wolf’s side. The wolf reared back on its hind legs, and Eddie saw the disk’s edge jutting from the wolf’s fur, blood streaming, just as it struck Keene.

Keene screamed once as he went down, the wolf’s jaws clamping shut over his shoulder. Blood flew into the air like the spray of paint from a broken can, splattering the cement wall with red. The wolf lifted its head from the tutor’s limp body and turned its gray, lupine gaze on Eddie, teeth dripping scarlet.

Eddie didn’t scream. There was no air in his lungs that he could have dragged up to make a sound; he scrambled to his feet and ran, ran for the mouth of the alley and the familiar neon lights of the street, ran for the safety of the real world. He could hear the wolf growling behind him, feel its hot breath on the backs of his legs. He put on one last burst of speed, flinging himself toward the street—

The wolf’s jaws closed on his leg, jerking him backward. Just before his head struck the hard pavement, plunging him into blackness, Eddie discovered that he did have enough air to scream, after all.

26. What Lies Beneath

The sound of dripping water woke him. Slowly, Eddie peeled his eyes open. There wasn't much to see. He lay on a wide cot that had been placed on the floor of a small dingy-walled room. There was a rickety table propped against one wall. On it was a cheap-looking brass candleholder sporting a fat red candle that cast the only light in the room. The ceiling was cracked and damp, wetness seeping down through the fissures in the stone. Eddie felt a vague sense that something was missing from the room, but this concern was overwhelmed by the strong smell of wet dog.

He sat up and immediately wished he hadn't. Hot pain drove through his head like a spike, followed by a racking wave of nausea. If there had been anything in his stomach, he would have thrown it up.

A mirror hung over the cot, dangling from a nail driven between two stones. Eddie glanced in it and was appalled. No wonder his face hurt—long parallel scratches ran from the corner of his right eye down to the edge of his mouth. His right cheek was crusted with blood, and blood was smeared on his neck and all down the front of his shirt and jacket. In a sudden panic he grabbed for his pocket, then relaxed. The stole was still there.

It was then that he realized what was odd about the room. One wall of it was bars: thick iron floor-to-ceiling bars. He was in a jail cell.

Veins surging with adrenaline, Eddie staggered to his feet. A wave of dizziness washed over him, and he caught at the table to steady himself. *I will not faint*, he told himself grimly. Then he heard the footsteps.

Someone was coming down the hallway outside the cell. Eddie backed up against the table.

It was a man. He was carrying a lamp, its light brighter than the candle, which made Eddie blink and turned him into a backlit shadow. He saw height, square shoulders, ragged hair; it was only when he pushed the door of the cell open and came inside that Eddie realized who he was.

He looked the same: worn jeans, denim shirt, work boots, same uneven hair, same glasses pushed down to the bridge of his nose. The scars he'd noticed along the side of his throat last time Eddie had seen him were healing patches of shiny skin now.

Jim.

It was all too much for Eddie. Exhaustion, lack of sleep and food, terror and blood-loss, caught up with him in a rushing wave. He felt his knees buckle as he slid toward the ground.

In seconds Jim was across the room. He moved so fast, Eddie didn't have time to hit the floor before Jim caught him, swinging him up the way he'd done when Eddie was a little boy. Jim set him down on the cot and stepped back, eyes anxious. "Eddie?" he said, reaching for Eddie. "Are you all right?"

Eddie flinched away, throwing up his hands to ward Jim off. "Don't touch me."

An expression of profound hurt crossed his face. Wearily he drew a hand across his forehead. "I guess I deserve that."

"Yeah. You do."

The look on his face was troubled. "I don't expect you to trust me—"

"That's good. Because I don't."

"Eddie ... " He began to pace the length of the cell. "What I did ... I don't expect you to understand. I know you feel that I abandoned you —"

"You *did* abandon me," Eddie said. "You told me never to call you again. You never cared about me. You never cared about my mother. You lied about everything."

"Not," he said, "about everything." A dark red patch was spreading across the front of his blue denim shirt.

Eddie sat up straight. "Is that *blood*?" he demanded. He forgot for a moment to be furious.

“Yes,” said Jim, his hand against his side. “The wound must have torn open when I lifted you.”

“What wound?” Eddie couldn’t help asking.

Jim said with deliberation: “Keene’s disks are still sharp, though his throwing arm is not what it once was. I think he may have nicked a rib.”

“Keene?” Eddie said. “When did you ...?”

He looked at Eddie, not saying anything, and he remembered suddenly the wolf in the alley, all black except for that one gray streak down its side, and he remembered the disk hitting it, and he realized.

“You’re a *werewolf*.”

Jim took his hand away from his shirt; his fingers were stained red. “Yep,” he said laconically. He moved to the wall and rapped sharply on it: once, twice, three times. Then he turned back to Eddie. “I am.”

“You killed Keene,” Eddie said, remembering.

“No.” He shook his head. “I hurt him pretty badly, I think, but when I went back for the body, it was gone. He must have dragged himself away.”

“You tore at his shoulder,” Eddie said. “I saw you.”

“Yes. Though it’s worth noting that he was trying to kill you at the time. Did he hurt anyone else?”

Eddie sank his teeth into his lip. He tasted blood, but it was old blood from where Gard had attacked him. “Ben,” he said in a whisper. “Keene knocked him out and handed him over to ... to Pennywise”

“To *Pennywise*?” Jim said, looking astonished. “I knew Keene had given him the Mortal Cup, but I hadn’t realized—”

“How did you know that?” Eddie began, before remembering. “You heard me talking to Keene in the alley,” he said. “Before you jumped

him.”

“I jumped him, as you put it, because he was about to slice your head off,” Jim said, then looked up as the cell door opened again and a tall man came in, followed by a tiny woman, so short she looked like a child. Both of them wore plain, casual clothes: jeans and cotton shirts, and both had the same untidy, flyaway hair, though the woman’s was blonde and the man’s was a badgery gray and black. Both had the same young-old faces, unlined but with tired eyes. “Eddie,” said Jim. “meet my second and third, Gretel and Alaric.”

Alaric inclined his massive head to Eddie. “We have met.”

Eddie stared, alarmed. “Have we?”

“At the Hotel Dumort,” he said. “You put your knife in my ribs.”

Eddie shrank against the wall. “I, ah ... I’m sorry?”

“Don’t be,” he said. “It was an excellent throw.” He slid a hand into his breast pocket and removed Richie’s dagger, with its winking red eye. He held it out to Eddie. “I think this is yours?”

Eddie stared. “But—”

“Don’t worry,” he assured. “I cleaned the blade.”

Wordlessly, he took it. Jim was chuckling under his breath. “In retrospect,” he said, “perhaps the raid on the Dumort was not as well planned as it might have been. I had set a group of my wolves to watch you, and go after you if you seemed to be in any danger. When you went into the Dumort ...”

“Richie and I could have handled it.” Eddie slid the dagger into his belt.

Gretel aimed a tolerant smile at Eddie. “Is that what you summoned us for, sir?”

“No,” said Jim. He touched his side. “My wound’s opened up, and Eddie here has some injuries of his own that could use a bit of tending. If you wouldn’t mind getting the supplies ...”

Gretel inclined her head. "I will return with the healing kit," she said, and left, Alaric trailing her like an outsize shadow.

"She called you 'sir,'" said Eddie, the moment the cell door closed behind them. "And what do you mean by your second and your third? Second and third what?"

"In command," said Jim slowly. "I am the leader of this particular wolf pack. That's why Gretel called me 'sir.' Believe me, it took a fair bit of work to break her of the habit of calling me 'master.'"

"Did my mother know?"

"Know what?"

"That you're a werewolf."

"Yes. She's known since it happened."

"Neither of you, of course, thought to mention this to me."

"I would have told you," said Jim. "But your mother was adamant that you know nothing of Shadowhunters or the Shadow World. I couldn't explain away my being a werewolf as some kind of isolated incident, Eddie. It's all part of the larger pattern that your mother didn't want you to see. I don't know what you've learned—"

"A lot," Eddie said flatly. "I know my mother was a Shadowhunter. I know she was married to Pennywise and that she stole the Mortal Cup from him and went into hiding. I know that after she had me, she took me to Jane Ives every two years to have my Sight taken away. I know that when Pennywise tried to get you to tell him where the Cup was in exchange for my mom's life, you told him she didn't matter to you."

Jim stared at the wall. "I didn't know where the Cup was," he said. "She'd never told me."

"You could have tried to bargain—"

"Pennywise doesn't bargain. He never has. If the advantage isn't his, he won't even come to the table. He's entirely single-minded and

totally without compassion, and though he may have loved your mother once, he wouldn't hesitate to kill her. No, I wasn't going to bargain with Pennywise"

"So you just decided to *abandon* her?" Eddie demanded furiously. "You're the leader of a whole pack of werewolves and you just decided she didn't even really need your help? You know, it was bad enough when I thought you were another Shadowhunter and you'd turned your back on her because of some stupid Shadowhunter vow or something, but now I know you're just a slimy Downworlder who didn't even care that all those years she treated you like a friend—like an equal—and this is how you paid her back!"

"Listen to you," Jim said quietly. "You sound like a Denbrough."

He narrowed his eyes. "Don't talk about Bill and Ben like you know them."

"I meant their parents," said Jim. "Who I did know, very well in fact, when we were all Shadowhunters together."

Eddie felt his lips part in surprise. "I know you were in the Circle, but how did you keep them from finding out you were a werewolf? Didn't they know?"

"No," said Jim. "Because I wasn't born a werewolf. I was made one. And I can already see that if you're going to be persuaded to listen to anything I have to say, you're going to have to hear the whole story. It's a long tale, but I think we have the time for it."

"The truth is, I've known your mother since we were children We grew up in Derry. It's a beautiful place, and I've always regretted that you've never seen it: You would love the glossy pines in winter, the dark earth and cold crystal rivers. There's a small network of towns and a single city, Alicante, where the Clave meets. They call it the Glass City because its towers are shaped from the same demon-repelling substance as our steles; in the sunlight they sparkle like glass.

When Sonia and I were old enough, we were sent to Alicante to school. It was there that I met Bob. Pennywise.

He was older than I was by a year. By far the most popular boy in school. He was handsome, clever, rich, dedicated, an incredible warrior. I was nothing—neither rich nor brilliant, from an unremarkable country family. And I struggled in my studies. Sonia was a natural Shadowhunter; I was not. I could not bear the lightest Marks or learn the simplest techniques. I thought sometimes about running away, returning home in shame. Even becoming a mundane. I was that miserable.

It was Bob who saved me. He came to my room—I'd never even thought he knew my name. He offered to train me. He said he knew that I was struggling, but he saw in me the seeds of a great Shadowhunter. And under his tutelage I did improve. I passed my exams, bore my first Marks, killed my first demon.

I worshipped him. I thought the sun rose and set on Robert Gray. I wasn't the only misfit he'd rescued, of course. There were others, Norbert Keene, who got along better with books than he did with people; Arlene Hanscom, whose brother had married a mundane; Zack Denbrough, who was terrified of the Marks—Bob brought them all under his wing. I thought it was kindness, then; now I am not so sure. Now I think he was building himself a cult.

Bob was obsessed with the idea that in every generation there were fewer and fewer Shadowhunters—that we were a dying breed. He was sure that if only the Clave would more freely use Raziel's Cup, more Shadowhunters could be made. To the teachers this idea was sacrilege—it is not for just anyone to choose who can and cannot become a Shadowhunter. Flippantly, Bob would ask: Why not make all men Shadowhunters, then? Why not gift them all with the ability to see the Shadow World? Why keep that power selfishly to ourselves?

When the teachers answered that most humans cannot survive the transition, Bob claimed they were lying, trying to keep the power of the Nephilim limited to an elite few. That was his claim, at the time—now I think he probably felt the collateral damage was worth the end result. In any case, he convinced our little group of his rightness. We formed the Circle, with our stated intent being to save the race of Shadowhunters from extinction. Of course, being seventeen, we weren't quite sure how we would do it, but we were sure we'd eventually accomplish something significant.

Then came the night that Bob's father was killed in a routine raid on a

werewolf encampment. When Bob returned to school, after the funeral, he wore the red Marks of mourning. He was different in other ways. His kindness was now interspersed with flashes of rage that bordered on cruelty. I put this new behavior down to grief and tried harder than ever to please him. I never answered his anger with anger of my own. I felt only the sick sense that I had disappointed him.

The only one that could calm his rages was your mother. She had always stood a little apart from our group, sometimes mockingly calling us Bob's fan club. That changed when his father died. His pain awakened her sympathy. They fell in love.

I loved him too: He was my closest friend, and I was happy to see Sonia with him. When we left school, they married and went to live on her family's estate. I also returned home, but the Circle continued. It had started as a sort of school adventure, but it grew in scale and power, and Bob grew with it. Its ideals had changed as well. The Circle still clamored for the Mortal Cup, but since the death of his father, Bob had become an outspoken proponent of war against all Downworlders, not just those who broke the Accords. This world was for humans, he argued, not part demons. Demons could never be fully trusted.

What happened next was that Sonia became pregnant. The day she told me that, she also confessed that she had grown afraid of her husband. His behavior had turned weird, erratic. He would disappear into their cellars for nights at a time. Sometimes she would hear screams through the walls
....

I went to him. He laughed, dismissing her fears as the jitters of a woman carrying her first child. He invited me to hunt with him that night. We were still trying to clean out the nest of werewolves who had killed his father years before. We were parabatai, a perfect hunting team of two, warriors who would die for each other. So when Bob told me he would guard my back that night, I believed him. I didn't see the wolf until it was on me. I remember its teeth fastened in my shoulder, and nothing else of that night. When I awoke, I was lying in Bob's house, my shoulder bandaged, and Sonia was there.

Not all werewolf bites result in lycanthropy. I healed of the injury and passed the next weeks in a torment of waiting. Waiting for the full moon. The Clave would have locked me in an observation cell, had they known.

But Bob and Sonia kept silent. Three weeks later the moon rose full and bright, and I began to change. The first Change is always the hardest. I remember a bewilderment of agony, a blackness, and waking up hours later in a meadow miles from the city. I was covered in blood, the torn body of some small woodland animal at my feet.

Bob dragged me down the steps and into the woods with him. He told me that he ought to kill me himself, but seeing me then, he could not bring himself to do it. He gave me a dagger that had once belonged to his father. He said I should do the honorable thing and end my own life. He kissed the dagger when he handed it to me, and went back inside the manor house, and barred the door.

I ran through the night, sometimes as a man, sometimes as a wolf, until I crossed the border. I burst into the midst of the werewolf encampment, brandishing my dagger, and demanded to meet in combat the lycanthrope who had bitten me and turned me into one of them. Laughing, they pointed me toward the clan leader. Hands and teeth still bloody from the hunt, he rose to face me.

I had never been much for single combat. The crossbow was my weapon; I had excellent sight and aim. But I had never been very good at close range; it was Bob who was skilled in fighting hand to hand. But I wanted only to die, and to take with me the creature who had ruined me.

As the night faded into day, he began to tire, but my rage never abated. And as the sun began to set again, I sank my dagger into his neck and he died, soaking me with his blood.

I expected the pack to set on me and tear me apart. But they knelt at my feet and bared their throats in submission. The wolves have a law: Whoever kills the clan leader takes his place. I had come to the place of the wolves, and instead of finding death and vengeance there, I found a new life.

I left my old self behind and almost forgot what it was like to be a Shadowhunter. But I did not forget Sonia. The thought of her was a constant companion. I feared for her in the company of Bob, but knew that if I came near the manor house, the Circle would hunt me down and kill me.

In the end she came to me. I was asleep in the camp when my second in command came to tell me that there was a young Shadowhunter woman waiting to see me. I knew immediately who it must be. I could see the disapproval in his eyes as I raced to meet her.

She was waiting for me just outside the encampment. She was no longer pregnant, and looked drawn and pale. She had had her child, she said, a boy, and had named him Jonathan. She cried when she saw me. She was angry that I had not let her know I was still alive. Bob had told the Circle I had taken my own life, but she had not believed it. She knew that I would never do such a thing. I felt her faith in me was unwarranted, but I was so relieved to see her again that I didn't contradict her.

I asked how she had found me. She said that there were rumors in Alicante of a werewolf who had once been a Shadowhunter. Bob had heard the rumors too, and she had ridden to warn me. He came soon after, but I hid from him, as werewolves can, and he left without bloodshed.

After that I began to meet Sonia in secret. It was the year of the Accords, and all of Downworld was abuzz about them and Bob's probable plans for disrupting them. I heard that he had argued passionately in the Clave against the Accords, but with no success. So the Circle made a new plan, steeped in secrecy. They allied themselves with demons—the greatest enemies of Shadowhunters—in order to procure weapons that could be smuggled undetected into the Great Hall of the Angel, where the Accords would be signed. And with the aid of a demon, Bob stole the Mortal Cup. He left in its place a facsimile. It was months before the Clave realized the Cup was missing, and by then it was too late.

Sonia tried to learn what Bob intended to do with the Cup, but could not. But she knew that the Circle planned to fall upon the unarmed Downworlders and murder them in the Hall. After such wholesale slaughter, the Accords would fail.

Despite the chaos, in a strange way those were happy days. Sonia and I sent messages covertly to the faeries, the warlocks, and even to those age-old enemies of wolfkind, the vampires, warning them of Bob's plans and bidding them prepare for battle. We worked together, werewolf and Nephilim.

On the day of the Accords, I watched from a hidden place as Sonia and

Bob, now eating to be recognized as Pennywise, left the manor house. I remember how she bent to kiss the auburn head of her son. I remember the way the sun shone on her hair; I remember her smile.

They rode into Alicante by carriage; I followed running on four feet, and my pack ran with me. The Great Hall of the Angel was crowded with all the assembled Clave and score upon score of Downworlders. When the Accords were presented for signing, Pennywise rose to his feet, and the Circle rose with him, sweeping back their cloaks to lift their weapons. As the Hall exploded into chaos, Sonia ran to the great double doors of the Hall and flung them open.

My pack were the first at the door. We burst into the Hall, tearing the night with our howls, and were followed by faerie knights with weapons of glass and twisted thorns. After them came the Night Children with bared fangs, and warlocks wielding flame and iron. As the panicked masses fled the Hall, we fell upon the members of the Circle.

I fought through the crowd to Pennywise. My only thought had been of him—that I might be the one to kill him, that I might have that honor. I found him at last by the great statue of the Angel, dispatching a faerie knight with a broad stroke of his bloodstained dagger. When he saw me, he smiled, fierce and feral. “A werewolf who fights with sword and dagger,” he said, “is as unnatural as a dog who eats with a fork and a knife.”

I parried the blow, and we fought up and down the dais, while the battle raged around us and one by one the members of the Circle fell. I saw the Denbroughs drop their weapons and flee; Keene was already gone, having fled at the outset. And then I saw Sonia racing up the stairs toward me, her face a mask of fear. “Bob, stop!” she cried out. “This is Jim, your friend, almost your brother—”

With a snarl, Bob seized her and dragged her in front of him, his dagger to her throat. I dropped my blade. I would not risk his harming her. He saw what was in my eyes. “You always wanted her,” he hissed. “And now the two of you have plotted my betrayal together. You will regret what you have done, all the rest of your lives.”

With that, he snatched the locket from Sonia's throat and hurled it at me. The silver cord burned me like a lash. screamed and fell back, and in that

moment he vanished into the melee, dragging her with him. I followed, burned and bleeding, but he was too fast, cutting a path through the thick of the crowd and over the dead .

I staggered out into the moonlight. The Hall was burning and the sky was lit with fire. I could see all down the green lawns of the capital to the dark river, and the road along the riverbank where people were fleeing into the night. I found Sonia by the banks of the river, at last. Pennywise was gone and she was terrified for Jonathan, desperate to get home. We found a horse, and she plunged away. Dropping into wolf form, I followed at her heels.

I knew even as I neared the house that something was terribly wrong. Here too the smell of fire hung heavy in the air, and there was something overlaying it, something thick and sweet—the stench of demonic witchcraft. I became a man again as I limped up the long drive, white in the moonlight, like a river of silver leading ... to ruins. For the manor house had been reduced to ashes, layer upon layer of sifting whiteness, strewn across the lawns by the night wind. Only the foundations, like burned bones, were still visible: here a window, there a leaning chimney—but the substance of the house, the bricks and the mortar, the priceless books and ancient tapestries handed down through generations of Shadowhunters, was dust blowing across the face of the moon.

Pennywise had destroyed the house with demon fire. He must have. No fire of this world burns so hot, nor leaves so little behind.

I made my way into the still-smoldering ruins. I found Sonia kneeling on what had perhaps once been the front doorsteps. They were blackened by fire. And there were bones.

Charred to blackness, but recognizably human, with scraps of cloth here and there, and bits of jewelry the fire had not taken. Red and gold threads still clung to the bones of Sonia's mother, and the heat had melted her father's dagger to his skeletal hand. Among another pile of bones gleamed Bob's silver amulet, with the insignia of the Circle still burning white-hot upon its face ... and among the remains, scattered as if they were too fragile to hold together, were the bones of a child.

You will regret what you have done, Pennywise had said. And as I knelt with Sonia on the burned paving stones, I knew that he was right. I

did regret it and have regretted it every day since.

We rode back through the city that night, among the still-burning fires and shrieking people, and then out into the darkness of the country. It was a week before Sonia spoke again. I took her out of Derry. We fled to Paris. We had no money, but she refused to go to the Institute there and ask for help. She was done with Shadowhunters, she told me, done with the Shadow World.

I sat in the tiny, cheap hotel room we had rented and tried to reason with her, but it did no good. She was obstinate. At last she told me why: She was carrying another child, and had known it for weeks. She would make a new life for herself and her baby, and she wanted no whisper of Clave or Covenant ever to taint her future. She showed me the amulet she had taken from the pile of bones; in the flea market at Clignancourt she sold it, and with that money purchased an airplane ticket. She wouldn't tell me where she was going. The farther away she could get from Derry she said, the better.

The last words Sonia spoke to me in that dreary departure hall chilled me to the bone: "Pennywise is not dead."

After she was gone, I returned to my pack, but I found no peace there.

I hunted, but the hunt brought no satisfaction; and when it came time for the Accords to be signed at last, I went into the city to sign them.

I was astonished to see the Denbroughs, who seemed equally astonished that I wasn't dead. They themselves, they said, along with Norbert Keene and Daniel Hanscom were the only members of the former Circle to have escaped death that night in the Hall. Daniel, racked with grief over the loss of his wife, had hidden himself away at his country estate with his young son. The Clave had punished the other three with exile: They were leaving for New York, to run the Institute there. The Denbroughs, who had connections to the highest families in the Clave, got off with a far lighter sentence than Keene. A curse had been laid on him: He would go with them, but if ever he were to leave the hallowed ground of the Institute, he would be instantly slain. He was devoting himself to his studies, they said, and would make a fine tutor for their children.

When we had signed the Accords, I couldn't stop thinking about Sonia. I

determined to look for her.

I traveled a good deal, but more and more I found myself thinking of New York, and the exiled Shadowhunters there. Sonia, in a way, was an exile too. At length I arrived in New York with a single duffel bag and no idea where to look for your mother.

In the end I found her by chance. I was prowling the streets of SoHo, randomly. As I stood on the cobblestones of Broome Street, a painting hanging in a gallery window caught my eye.

It was the study of a landscape I recognized immediately: the view from the windows of her family's manor house, the green lawns sweeping down to the line of trees that hid the road beyond. I recognized her style, her brushwork, everything. I banged on the door of the gallery, but it was closed and locked. I returned to the painting, and this time saw the signature. It was the first time I had seen her new name: Sonia Kaspbrak. Her mother's maiden name.

By that evening, I had found her, living in a fifth-floor walk-up in that artists' haven, the East Village. I walked up the grimy half-lit stairs with my heart in my throat, and knocked on her door. It was opened by a little boy with dark hair and inquisitive eyes. And then, behind him, I saw Sonia walking toward me, her hands stained with paint and her face just the same as it had been when we were children

The rest you know.

Notes for the Chapter:

This was a long-ass chapter I'm so sorry, but it was important to explore Pennywise's story
<33333

27. Renwick's Ruin

For a long moment, after Jim finished speaking, there was silence in the room. The only sound was the faint drip of water down the stone walls. Finally, he said:

“Say something, Eddie.”

“What do you want me to say?”

He sighed. “Maybe that you understand?”

Eddie could hear his blood pounding in his ears. He felt as if his life had been built on a sheet of ice as thin as paper, and now the ice was beginning to crack, threatening to plunge him into the icy darkness below. Down into the dark water, he thought where all his mother’s secrets drifted in the currents, the forgotten remains of a shipwrecked life.

Eddie looked up at Jim. He seemed wavering, indistinct, as if Eddie looked through a blurred glass. “My father,” he said. “That picture my mother always kept on the mantel—”

“That wasn’t your father,” said Jim.

“Did he ever even exist?” Eddie’s voice rose. “Was there ever a John Clark, or did my mother make him up too?”

“John Clark existed. But he wasn’t your father. He was the son of two of your mother’s neighbors when you lived in the East Village. He died in a car crash, just like your mother told you, but she never knew him. She had his photo because the neighbors commissioned her to paint a portrait of him in his Army uniform. She gave them the portrait but kept the photo, and pretended the man in it had been your father. I think she thought it was easier that way. After all, if she’d claimed he’d run off or disappeared, you’d have wanted to look for him. A dead man—”

“Won’t contradict your lies,” Eddie finished for him bitterly. “Didn’t she think it was wrong, all those years, letting me think my father

was dead, when my real father—”

Jim said nothing, letting Eddie find the end of the sentence himself, letting him think the unthinkable thought on his own.

“Is *Pennywise*.” His voice shook. “That’s what you’re telling me, right? That Pennywise was—is—my father?”

Jim nodded, his knotted fingers the only sign of the tension he felt. “Yes.”

“Oh, my God.” Eddie leaped to his feet, no longer able to sit still. He paced to the bars of the cell. “That’s not possible. It’s just not possible.”

“Eddie, please don’t get upset—”

“Don’t get upset? You’re telling me that my dad is a guy who’s basically an evil overlord, and you want me not to get upset?”

“He wasn’t evil to begin with,” Jim said, sounding almost apologetic.

“Oh, I beg to differ. I think he was *clearly* evil. All that stuff he was spouting about keeping the human race pure and the importance of untainted blood—he was like one of those creepy white power guys. And you two totally fell for it.”

“I wasn’t the one talking about ‘slimy’ Downworlders just minutes ago,” Jim said quietly. “Or about how they couldn’t be trusted.”

“That’s not the same thing!” Eddie could hear the tears in his voice. “I had a *brother*,” he went on, his voice catching. “Grandparents, too. They’re dead?”

Jim nodded, looking down at his big hands, open on his knees. “They’re dead.”

“Jonathan,” he said softly. “He would have been older than me? A year older?”

Jim said nothing.

"I always wanted a brother," Eddie said.

"Don't," he said wretchedly. "Don't torture yourself. You can see why your mother kept all this from you, can't you? What good would it have done you to know what you had lost before you were even born?"

"That box," Eddie said, his mind working feverishly. "With the J. C. on it. That was what she was always crying over, that was his lock of hair—my brother's, not my father's."

"Yes."

"And when you said 'Eddie isn't Jonathan,' you meant my brother. My mom was so overprotective of me because she'd already had one child who died."

Before Jim could reply, the cell door clanged open and Gretel entered. The "healing kit," which Eddie had been envisioning was a hard plastic-sided box with the Red Cross insignia on it, turned out to be a big wooden tray, stacked with folded bandages, steaming bowls of unidentified liquids, and herbs that gave off a pungent lemony odor. Gretel set the tray down beside the cot and gestured for Eddie to sit down, which he did unwillingly.

"That's a good boy," said the wolf-woman, dipping a cloth into one of the bowls and lifting it to Eddie's face. Gently she cleaned away the dried blood. "What happened to you?" she asked disapprovingly, as if she suspected Eddie of taking a cheese grater to his face.

"Gard attacked me." Eddie tried not to wince as the astringent liquid stung his wounds.

"Gard?" Jim blinked.

"Keene's bird. I think it was his bird, anyway. Maybe it was Pennywise's."

"It was, it's name means 'Garden'"

"It should be 'Crazy Bird'." Eddie said. "He almost tore my eyes out."

"That's what he's trained to do." Jim was tapping the fingers of one hand against his other arm. "Keene must have taken him in after the Uprising. But he'd still be Pennywise's creature."

"Just like Keene was," Eddie said, wincing as Gretel cleaned the long slash along his arm, which was crusted with dirt and dried blood. Then Gretel began bandaging it up neatly.

"Eddie—"

"I don't want to talk about the past anymore," he said fiercely. "I want to know what we're going to do now. Now Pennywise's got my mom, Ben—and the Cup. And we've got nothing."

"I wouldn't say we have nothing," said Jim. "We have a powerful wolf pack. The problem is that we don't know where Pennywise is."

Eddie shook his head. God, he was filthy. The one thing he wanted more than anything else—almost anything else—was a shower. "Doesn't Pennywise have some kind of hideout? A secret lair?"

"If he does," said Jim, "he has kept it secret indeed."

"Could he be somewhere in New York?"

"Possibly."

"When I saw him at the Institute, he came through a Portal. Eleven said there are only two Portals in New York. One at Dorothea's, and one at Renwick's. The one at Dorothea's was destroyed, and I can't really see him hiding out there anyway, so—"

"Renwick's?" Jim looked baffled. "Renwick isn't a Shadowhunter name."

"What if Renwick isn't a person, though?" said Eddie. "What if it's a place? Renwick's. Like a restaurant, or ... or a hotel or something." A thought came to Eddie. "Do you have a phone?" he said.

"Not on me." Jim looked at Gretel. "Could you get the telephone?"

With a disgusted snort she tossed the wad of bloody cloths she'd been

holding onto the floor, and stalked out of the room. Jim picked up the roll of bandaging, and began winding it around the diagonal cut across his ribs. "Sorry," he said, as Eddie stared. "I know it's disgusting."

"If we catch Pennywise," Eddie asked abruptly, "can we kill him?"

Jim nearly dropped the bandages. "What?"

Eddie fiddled with a stray thread poking out of the pocket of his jeans. "He killed my older brother. He killed my grandparents. Didn't he?"

"And you think killing him will what? Erase those things?"

Gretel returned before Eddie could say anything to that. She wore a martyred expression and handed Jim a clunky-looking old-fashioned cell phone. Eddie wondered who paid the phone bills.

Eddie held his hand out. "Let me make a call."

Jim seemed hesitant. "Eddie ..."

"It's about Renwick's. It'll only take a second."

He handed him the phone warily. Eddie punched in the number, and half-turned away from Jim.

Stan picked up on the third ring. "Hello?"

"It's me."

His voice climbed an octave. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. Why? Have you heard anything from Beverly?"

"No. What would I have heard from Beverly? Is there something wrong? Is it Bill?"

"No," Eddie said, not wanting to lie and say that Bill was fine. "It's not Bill. Look, I just need you to Google something for me."

Stan snorted. "You're kidding. Don't they have a computer there? You

know what, don't answer that." Eddie heard the sounds of a door opening and the thump-meow as Stan's mother's cat was banished from his perch on the keyboard of his computer. Eddie could picture Stan quite clearly in his head as he sat down, his fingers moving quickly over the keyboard. "What do you want me to look up?"

Eddie told him. He could feel Jim's worried eyes on him as he talked.

"You're right," Stan said, snapping Eddie out of his reverie. "It's a place. Or at least, it was a place. It's abandoned now."

Eddie's sweaty hand slipped on the phone, and he tightened his grip. "Tell me about it."

"The most famous of the lunatic asylums, debtor's prisons, and hospitals built on Roosevelt Island in the 1800s," Stan read dutifully. "Renwick Smallpox Hospital was designed by architect Jacob Renwick and intended to quarantine the poorest victims of Manhattan's uncontrollable smallpox epidemic. During the next century the hospital was abandoned to disrepair. Public access to the ruin is forbidden."

"Okay, that's enough," said Eddie, his heart pounding. "That's got to be it. Roosevelt Island."

"Do you need me to give you a ride again or something?"

"No! I'm fine, I don't need anything. I just wanted the information."

"All right." He sounded a little hurt, Eddie thought, but told himself it didn't matter. He was safe at home, and that was what was important.

He hung up, turning to Jim. "There's an abandoned hospital at the south end of Roosevelt Island called Renwick's. I think Pennywise's there."

Jim shoved his glasses up again. "Blackwell's Island. Of course."

"What do you mean, Blackwell's? I said—"

Jim cut him off with a gesture. "That's what Roosevelt Island used to

be called. Blackwell's. It was owned by an old Shadowhunter family. I should have guessed." He turned to Gretel. "Get Alaric. We're going to need everyone back here as soon as possible." His lips were curled into a half smile that reminded Eddie of the cold grin Richie wore during fights. "Tell them to ready themselves for battle."

They made their way up to the street via a circuitous maze of cells and corridors that eventually opened out into what had once been the lobby of a police station. The building was abandoned now, and the slanting light of late afternoon cast strange shadows over the empty desks, the padlocked cabinets pocked with black termite holes, the cracked floor tiles spelling out the motto of the NYPD: *Fidelis ad Mortem*.

"Faithful unto death," said Jim, following Eddie's gaze.

"Let me guess," said Eddie. "On the inside it's an abandoned police station; from the outside, mundanes only see a condemned apartment building, or a vacant lot, or ..."

"Actually it looks like a Chinese restaurant from the outside," Jim said. "Takeout only, no table service."

Still not sure if he was kidding or not, Eddie followed Jim across Baxter Street to where his car was parked. The inside of the pickup truck was comfortably familiar.

Jim shut the door after Eddie. "Stay right here."

Eddie watched as he talked to Gretel and Alaric, who were standing on the steps of the old police station, waiting patiently. Eddie amused himself by letting his eyes fade in and out of focus, watching the glamour appear and disappear. First it was an old police station, then it was a dilapidated storefront sporting a yellow awning that read **JADE WOLF CHINESE CUISINE**

Jim accepted a paper bag from Gretel, and with a nod, bounded back to the pickup. Folding his lanky body behind the wheel, he handed Eddie the bag. "You're in charge of this."

Eddie peered at it suspiciously. "What is it? Weapons?"

Jim's shoulders shook with soundless laughter. "Steamed bao buns, actually," he said, pulling the truck out into the street. "And coffee."

Eddie ripped the bag open as they headed uptown, his stomach growling furiously. He tore a bun apart, savoring the rich savory-salt taste of the pork, the chewiness of the white dough. Eddie washed it down with a swig of black supersweet coffee, and offered a bun to Jim. "Want one?"

"Sure." It was almost like old times, he thought, as they swung onto Canal Street, when they had picked up bags of hot dumplings from the Golden Carriage Bakery and eaten half of them on the drive home over the Manhattan Bridge.

"So tell me about this Ben," said Jim.

"What about him?"

"Do you have any idea what Pennywise might want with him?"

"No."

Jim frowned into the setting sun. "I thought Ben was one of the Denbrough kids?"

"Adopted." Eddie bit into a third bun. "His last name is Hanscom. His biological parents were—"

"Arlene and Daniel Hanscom?"

"I guess. I think Pennywise killed them."

"That sounds like something Pennywise would do." said Jim. His tone was neutral, but there was something in his voice that made Eddie look at him sideways. "Poor kid."

They were driving over the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge. Eddie glanced down and saw the river turned all to gold and blood by the setting sun. He could glimpse the south end of Roosevelt Island from here, though it was just a smudge to the north. "The Denbroughs have

taken good care of him.”

“I can imagine. They were always close with the Hanscoms,” observed Jim, swerving into the left lane. In the side mirror Eddie could see the caravan of following vehicles alter its course to mimic his. “They would want to look after his son.”

“Yeah, they looked up after Richie too.”

“Richie? Richard Tozier?”

Eddie thought for a moment of him. “Yep. He was adopted as well, he’s the one who saved me.”

“I have a lot to thank him, then.”

“So what happens when the moon comes up?” Eddie asked. “Are you all going to suddenly wolf out, or what?”

Jim’s mouth twitched. “Not exactly. Only the young ones, the ones who’ve just Changed, can’t control their transformations. Most of the rest of us have learned how to, over the years. Only the moon at its fullest can force a Change on me now.”

“So when the moon’s only partly full, you only feel a little wolfy?” Eddie asked.

“You could say that.”

“Well, you can go ahead and hang your head out the car window if you feel like it.”

Jim laughed. “I’m a werewolf, not a golden retriever.”

“How long have you been the clan leader?” he asked abruptly.

Jim hesitated. “About a week.”

Eddie swung around to stare at him. “A week?”

He sighed. “I knew Pennywise had taken your mother,” he said without much inflection. “I knew I had little chance against him by

myself and that I could expect no assistance from the Clave. It took me a day to track down the location of the nearest lycanthrope pack.”

“You killed the clan leader so you could take his place?”

“It was the fastest way I could think of to acquire a sizeable number of allies in a short period of time,” said Jim, without any regret in his tone, though without any pride either. Eddie remembered spying on him in his house, how he’d noticed the deep scratches on his hands and face and the way he’d winced when he moved his arm. “I had done it before. I was fairly sure I could do it again.” He shrugged. “Your mother was gone. I knew I’d made you hate me. I had nothing to lose.”

Eddie braced his green sneakers against the dashboard. Through the cracked windshield, above the tips of his toes, the moon was rising over the bridge. “Well,” he said. “You do now.”

The hospital at the southern end of Roosevelt Island was floodlit at night, its ghostly outlines curiously visible against the darkness of the river and the greater illumination of Manhattan. Jim and Eddie fell silent as the pickup skirted the tiny island, as the paved road they were on turned to gravel and finally to packed dirt. The road followed the curve of a high chain-link fence, the top of which was strung with curlicues of razor wire like festive loops of ribbon.

When the road grew too bumpy for them to drive any farther, Jim pulled the truck to a stop and killed the lights. He looked at Eddie. “Any chance if I asked you to wait here for me, you would?”

He shook his head. “It wouldn’t necessarily be any safer in the car. Who knows what Pennywise’s got patrolling his perimeter?”

Jim laughed softly. “*Perimeter*. Listen to you.” He swung himself out of the truck and came around to Eddie’s side to help him down. Eddie could have jumped down from the truck himself, but it was nice to have Jim help, the way he’d done when Eddie was too small to climb down on his own.

Beyond a fence, the hospital itself was a ruin bathed in harsh light that pointed out its dilapidated state: the roofless walls jutting up from the uneven ground like broken teeth, the crenellated stone parapets overgrown with a green carpet of ivy. "It's a wreck," Eddie heard himself say softly, a flicker of apprehension in his voice. "I don't see how Pennywise could possibly be hiding here."

Jim glanced past him at the hospital. "It's a strong glamour," he said. "Try to look past the lights." Alaric was walking over to them along the road, the light breeze making his denim jacket flutter open, showing the scarred chest underneath. The werewolves walking behind him looked like completely ordinary people, Eddie thought. If he'd seen them all together in a group somewhere, he might have thought they knew each other somehow—there was a certain nonphysical resemblance, a bluntness to their gazes, a forcefulness to their expressions. Eddie might have thought they were farmers, since they looked more sunburned, lean, and rawboned than your average city-dweller, or maybe he would have taken them for a biker gang. But they looked nothing like monsters.

"You see it?" It was Jim, who had come up behind Eddie with the padding grace of—well, a wolf.

Eddie was still staring. "It looks more like a castle than a hospital."

Taking him by the shoulders, Jim turned Eddie to face him. "Eddie, listen to me." His grip was painfully tight. "I want you to stay next to me. Move when I move. Hold on to my sleeve if you have to. The others are going to stay around us, protecting us, but if you get outside the circle, they won't be able to guard you. They're going to move us toward the door." He dropped his hands from her shoulders, and when he moved, Eddie saw the glint of something metal just inside his jacket. He hadn't realized Jim was carrying a weapon, but then he remembered what Stan had said about what was in Jim's old green duffel bag and supposed it made sense. "Do you promise you'll do what I say?"

"I promise."

The fence was real, not part of the glamour. Alaric, still in front, rattled it experimentally, then raised a lazy hand. Long claws

sprouted from beneath his fingernails, and he slashed at the chain-link with them, slicing the metal to ribbons. They fell in a clattering pile, like Tinkertoys.

“Go.” He gestured the others through. They surged forward like one person, a coordinated sea of movement. Gripping Eddie’s arm, Jim pushed him ahead, ducking to follow. They straightened up inside the fence, looking up toward the smallpox hospital, where gathered dark shapes, massed on the porch, were beginning to move down the steps.

Alaric had his head up, sniffing the wind. “The stench of death lies heavy on the air.”

Jim’s breath left his lungs in a hissing rush. “*Forsaken.*”

Jim shoved Eddie behind him; Eddie went, stumbling slightly on the uneven ground. The pack began to move toward him and Jim; as they neared, they dropped to all fours, lips snarling back from their lengthening fangs, limbs extending into long, furred extremities, clothes overgrown by fur. Some tiny instinctual voice in the back of Eddie’s brain was screaming at him: *Wolves! Run away!* But he fought it and stayed where he was, though he could feel the jump and tremble of nerves in his hands.

The pack encircled them, facing outward. More wolves flanked the circle on either side. It was as if he and Jim were the center of a star. Like that, they began to move toward the front porch of the hospital. Still behind Jim, Eddie didn’t even see the first of the Forsaken as they struck. He heard a wolf howl as if in pain. The howl went up and up, turning quickly into a snarl. There was a thudding sound, then a gurgling cry and a sound like ripping paper—

Eddie found himself wondering if the Forsaken were edible.

He glanced up at Jim. His face was set. Eddie could see them now, beyond the ring of wolves, the scene lit to brilliance by floodlights and the shimmering glow of Manhattan: dozens of Forsaken, their skin corpse-pale in the moonlight, seared by lesionlike runes. Their eyes were vacant as they hurled themselves at the wolves, and the wolves met them head-on, claws tearing, teeth gouging and rending.

He saw one of the Forsaken warriors—a woman—fall back, throat torn out, arms still twitching. Another hacked at a wolf with one arm while the other arm lay on the ground a meter away, blood pulsing from the stump. Black blood, brackish as swamp water, ran in streams, slicking the grass so that Eddie's feet slipped out from under him. Jim caught him before he could fall. "Stay with me."

Distracted, Eddie hardly noticed the Forsaken that broke through the protective circle, until it loomed up in front of him, as if it had sprung up from the grass at his feet. White-eyed, with matted hair, it raised a dripping knife.

He screamed. Jim whirled, dragging him sideways, and caught the thing's wrist, and twisted. He heard the snap of bone, and the knife fell to the grass. The Forsaken's hand dangled limply, but it kept coming on toward them, evincing no sign of pain. Jim was shouting hoarsely for Alaric. Eddie tried to reach the dagger in his belt, but Jim's grip on his arm was too strong.

Before he could shout at Jim to let go, a lick of slim silver fire hurtled between them. It was Gretel. She landed with her front paws against the Forsaken's chest, knocking it to the ground. A fierce whine of rage rose from Gretel's throat, but the Forsaken was stronger; it flung her aside like a rag doll and rolled to its feet.

Something lifted Eddie off his feet. He shouted, but it was Alaric, half in and half out of wolf-form, his hands taloned with sharp claws. Still, they held Eddie gently as Alaric swung him up into his arms.

Jim was motioning at them. "Get him out of here! Get him to the doors!" he was shouting.

"Jim!" Eddie twisted in Alaric's grasp.

"Don't look," Alaric said in a growl.

But Eddie did look. Long enough to see Jim start toward Gretel, a blade in his hand, but he was too late. The Forsaken seized up its knife, which had fallen into the blood-wet grass, and sank it into Gretel's back, again and again as she clawed and struggled and finally collapsed, the light in her silvery eyes fading into darkness. With a

shout Jim swung his blade at the Forsaken's throat—

"I told you not to look," Alaric growled, turning so that Eddie's line of sight was blocked by his looming bulk. They were racing up the steps now, the sound of his clawed feet scraping the granite like nails on a blackboard.

"Alaric," Eddie said.

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry I threw a knife at you."

"Don't be. It was a well-placed blow."

Eddie tried to look past him. "Where's Jim?"

"I'm here," Jim said. Alaric turned. Jim was coming up the steps, sliding his sword back into its sheath, which was strapped to his side, beneath his jacket. The blade was black and sticky.

Alaric let Eddie slide to the porch. Eddie landed, turning. He couldn't see Gretel or the Forsaken who had killed her, only a mass of heaving bodies and flashing metal. His face was wet. He reached up with a free hand to see if he was bleeding but realized that he was crying instead. Jim looked at him curiously. "She was only a Downworlder," he said.

Eddie's eyes burned. "Don't say that."

"I see." He turned to Alaric. "Thank you for taking care of Eddie. While we go on—"

"I'm going with you," said Alaric. He had made most of the transformation to man-form, but his eyes were still wolf's eyes, and his lips were drawn back from teeth as long as toothpicks. He flexed his long-nailed hands.

Jim's eyes were troubled. "Alaric, no."

Alaric's growling voice was flat. "You are the pack leader. I am your second now that Gretel is dead. It would not be right to let you go alone."

“I—” Jim looked at Eddie, and then back out at the field in front of the hospital. “I need you out here, Alaric. I’m sorry. That’s an order.”

Alaric’s eyes flashed resentfully, but he stepped aside. The hospital door was ornate heavy carved wood, patterns familiar to Eddie, the roses of Idris, curling runes, rayed suns. It gave with the popping noise of a burst latch when Jim kicked at it. He pushed Eddie forward as the door swung wide. “Get inside.”

He stumbled past Jim, turned on the threshold. He caught a single brief glimpse of Alaric looking after them, his wolf eyes gleaming. Behind him the lawn in front of the hospital was strewn with bodies, the dirt stained with blood, black and red. When the door slammed shut behind Eddie, cutting off his view, he was grateful.

28. Ben

Eddie and Jim stood in half-lit dimness, in a stone entryway lit by a single torch. After the din of battle the silence was like a smothering cloak. Eddie found himself gasping in breaths of air, air that wasn't thick with humidity and the smell of blood.

Jim gripped Eddie's shoulder with his hand. "Are you all right?"

Eddie wiped at his cheeks. "You shouldn't have said that. About Gretel being just a Downworlder. I don't think that."

"I'm glad to hear it." He reached for the torch in its metal holder. "I hated the idea of the Denbroughs turning you into a copy of them."

"Well, they haven't."

The torch would not come away in Jim's hand; he frowned. Digging into his pocket, Eddie removed the smooth rune-stone Richie had given him for his birthday, and raised it high. Light burst between his fingers, as if he'd cracked a seed of darkness, letting out the illumination trapped inside. Jim let go of the torch.

"Witchlight?" he said.

"Richie gave it to me." Eddie could feel it pulse in his hand like the heartbeat of a tiny bird. He wondered where Richie was right now, if he was missing him. If he missed anyone at all.

"It's been years since I fought by witchlight," Jim said started up the stairs. They creaked loudly under his boots. "Follow me."

The flaring glow of the witchlight cast their shadows, weirdly elongated, against the smooth granite walls. They paused at a stone landing that curved around in an arc. Above them he could see light. "Is this what the hospital used to look like, hundreds of years ago?" Eddie whispered.

"Oh, the bones of what Renwick built are still here," said Jim. "But I would imagine Pennywise, Hagarty and the others had the place renovated to be a bit more to their taste. Look here." He scraped a

boot along the floor. Eddie glanced down and saw a rune carved into the granite beneath their feet: a circle, in the center of which was a Latin motto: *In Hoc Signo Vinces*.

"What does that mean?" Eddie asked.

"It means 'By this sign we will conquer.' It was the motto of the Circle."

Eddie glanced up, toward the light. "So they're here."

"They're here," said Jim, and there was anticipation in the narrow edge of his tone. "Come."

They went up the winding staircase, circling under the light until it was all around them and they were standing at the entrance to a long and narrow corridor. Torches blazed along the passage. Eddie closed his hand over the witchlight, and it blinked out like a doused star.

There were doors set at intervals along the corridor, all of them closed tight. Eddie wondered if they had been wards when this had once been a hospital, or perhaps private rooms. As they moved down the corridor, Eddie saw the marks of boot-prints, muddy from the grass outside, crisscrossing the passage. Someone had walked here recently.

The room was a bedroom. The hangings around the four-poster bed were blue, the Persian carpet patterned in blue, black, and gray, and the furniture was painted white, like the furnishings in a child's room. A thin and ghostly layer of dust covered it all, glinting faintly in the moonlight.

In the bed lay Sonia, asleep.

She was on her back, one hand thrown carelessly across her chest, her hair spread across the pillow. She wore a sort of white nightdress Eddie had never seen, and she was breathing regularly and quietly. In the piercing moonlight Eddie could see the flutter of his mother's eyelids as she dreamed.

With a little scream, Eddie hurled himself forward—but Jim's outflung arm caught him across the chest like a bar of iron, holding

him back. "Wait," he said, his own voice tense with effort. "We have to be careful."

Eddie glared at him, but he was looking past Eddie, his expression angry and pained. Eddie followed the line of his gaze and saw what he had not wanted to see before. Silver manacles closed around Sonia's wrists and feet, the ends of their chains sunk deep into the stone floor on either side of the bed. The table beside the bed was covered in a weird array of tubes and bottles, glass jars and long, wickedly tipped instruments glinting with surgical steel. A rubberized tube ran from one of the glass jars to a vein in Sonia's left arm.

Eddie jerked himself away from Jim's restraining hand and lunged toward the bed, wrapping his arms around his mother's unresponsive body. But it was like trying to hug a badly jointed doll. Sonia remained motionless and stiff, her slow breathing unaltered.

A week ago Eddie would have cried as he had that first terrible night he had discovered his mother missing, cried and called out. But no tears came now, as he let his mother go and straightened up. There was no terror in him now, and no self-pity: only a bitter rage and a need to find the man who'd done this, the one responsible for all of it.

"Pennywise," he said.

"Of course." Jim was beside him, touching Sonia's face lightly, raising her eyelids. The eyes beneath were as blank as marbles. "She's not drugged," he said. "Some kind of spell, I expect."

Eddie let his breath out in a tight half sob. "How do we get her out of here?"

"I can't touch the manacles," said Jim "Silver. Do you have—"

"The weapons room," Eddie said, standing up. "I saw an ax there. Several. We could cut the chains—"

"Those chains are unbreakable." The voice that spoke from the door was low, gritty, and familiar. Eddie spun and saw Hagarty. He was grinning now, wearing the same clotted-blood-colored robes as

before, the hood pushed back, muddy boots visible under the hem. "Hopper," he said. "What a nice surprise."

Jim stood up. "If you're surprised, you're an idiot," he said. "I didn't exactly arrive quietly."

Hagarty's cheeks flushed a darker purple, but he didn't move toward Jim. "Clan leader again, are you?" he said, and gave an unpleasant laugh. "Can't break yourself of the habit of getting Downworlders to do your dirty work? Pennywise's troops are busy strewing pieces of them all over the lawn."

Eddie flushed angrily, his hands balling into fists, but Jim's voice, when he replied, was polite. "I wouldn't exactly call those troops, Hagarty" he said. "They're Forsaken. Tormented once-human beings. If I recall properly, the Clave looks pretty darkly on all that—torturing people, performing black magic. I can't imagine they'll be too pleased."

"Damn the Clave," growled Hagarty. "We don't need them and their half-breed-tolerating ways. Besides, the Forsaken won't be Forsaken much longer. When Pennywise uses the Cup on them, they'll be Shadowhunters as good as the rest of us—better than what the Clave is passing off as warriors these days. Downworlder-loving milksops." He bared his blunt teeth.

"If that is his plan for the Cup," said Jim, "why hasn't he done it already? What's he waiting for?"

Hagarty's eyebrows went up. "Didn't you know? He's got his—"

A silky laugh interrupted him. Brooks had appeared at his elbow, all in black with a leather strap across his shoulder. "Enough, Hagarty," he said. "You talk too much, as usual." He flashed his pointed teeth at Jim. "Interesting move, Hopper. I didn't think you'd have the stomach for leading your newest clan on a suicide mission."

A muscle twitched in Jim's cheek. "Sonia," he said. "What has he done to her?"

Brooks chuckled musically. "I thought you didn't care."

"I don't see what he wants with her now," Jim went on, ignoring the jibe. "He's got the Cup. She can't be of further use. Pennywise was never one for pointless murder. Murder with a point. Now, that might be a different story."

Brooks shrugged indifferently. "It makes no difference to us what he does with her," he said. "She was his wife. Perhaps he hates her. That's a point."

"Let her go," said Jim, "and we'll leave with her, call the clan off. I'll owe you one."

"No!" Eddie's furious outburst made Brooks and Hagarty swing their stares to him. Both looked faintly incredulous, as if he were a talking cockroach. He turned to Jim. "There's still Ben. He's here somewhere."

Hagarty was chuckling. "Ben? Never heard of a Ben," he said. "Now, I could ask Brooks to let her out. But I'd rather not. She was always a bitch to me, Sonia was. Thought she was better than the rest of us, with her looks and her lineage. Just a pedigreed bitch, that's all. She only married him so she could turn it around on us all—"

"Disappointed you didn't get to marry him yourself, Hagarty?" was all Jim said in reply, though Eddie could hear the cold rage in his voice.

Hagarty, his face purpling, took an angry step forward into the room. And Jim, moving so swiftly that Eddie almost did not see him do it, seized a scalpel from the bedside table and flung it. It flipped twice in the air and sank point-first into Hagarty's throat, cutting off his growling retort. He gagged, eyes rolling up to the whites, and fell to his knees, hands at his throat. Scarlet liquid pulsed between his spread fingers. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but only a thin line of blood dribbled out. His hands slipped from his throat, and he crashed to the ground like a tree falling.

"Oh, dear," said Brooks, gazing at the fallen body of his comrade with fastidious distaste. "How unpleasant."

Blood from Hagarty's cut throat was spreading across the floor in a

viscous red pool. Jim, taking Eddie's shoulder, whispered something in his ear. It meant nothing. Eddie was aware only of a numb buzzing in his head. He remembered another poem from English class, something about how after the first death you saw, no other deaths mattered. That poet hadn't known what he was talking about.

Jim let Eddie go. "The keys, Brooks," he said.

Brooks nudged Hagarty with a foot, and glanced up. He looked irritable. "Or what? You'll throw a syringe at me? There was only one blade on that table. No," he added, reaching behind him and drawing from his shoulder a long and wicked-looking sword, "I'm afraid that if you want the keys, you'll have to come and get them. Not because I care about Sonia Gray one way or the other, you understand, but only because I, for one, have been looking forward to killing you ... for years."

He drew the last word out, savoring it with a delicious exultation as he moved forward into the room. His blade flashed, a spear of lightning in the moonlight. Eddie saw Jim thrust a hand out toward him—a strangely elongated hand, tipped with nails like tiny daggers—and Eddie realized two things: that he was about to Change, and that what he had whispered in his ear was a single word.

Run.

He ran. He zigzagged around Brooks, who barely glanced at him, skirted Hagarty's body, and was out the door and in the corridor, heart pounding, before Jim's transformation was complete. He didn't glance back, but he heard a howl, long and piercing, the sound of metal on metal, and a shattering fall. Breaking glass, he thought. Perhaps they had knocked over the bedside table.

He limped down the corridor—he was beginning to feel the ache of true exhaustion in his legs and arms—and found himself at the junction of the stairs. Up or down? Down, he recalled, had been lightless, empty. Of course, there was the witchlight in his pocket, but something in him quailed at the thought of entering those black spaces alone. Upstairs he saw the blaze of more lights, caught a

flicker of something that might have been movement.
He went up. His legs hurt, his feet hurt, everything hurt.

He reached the last landing. It was curved gently like the bow of a ship, as silent here as it had been downstairs; no sound of the fighting outside reached his ears. Another long corridor stretched out in front of him, with the same multiple doors, but here some were open, spilling even more light out into the hallway. He went forward, and some instinct drew him to the last door on his left. Cautiously he glanced inside.

At first the room reminded him of one of the period reconstruction displays in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was as if he had stepped into the past—the paneled walls gleamed as if recently polished, as did the endlessly long dining table set with delicate china. An ornate gold-framed mirror adorned the far wall, between two oil portraits in heavy frames. Everything glittered under the torchlight: the plates on the table, heaped with food, the fluted glasses shaped like calla lilies, the linens so white they were blinding. At the end of the room were two wide windows, draped with swags of heavy velvet. Ben stood at one of the windows, so still that for a moment Eddie imagined he was a statue, until he realized he could see the light shining on Ben's hair. His left hand held the curtain aside, and in the dark window he saw the reflection of the dozens of candles inside the room, trapped in the glass like fireflies.

“Ben” he said. He heard his own voice as if from a distance: astonishment, gratitude, longing so sharp it was painful. Ben turned, dropping the curtain, and Eddie saw the wondering look on his face.

“Eddie.” His voice was almost unrecognizable. “Eddie, what are you doing here?”

“I came for you.”

“How did you find me?”

“Jim,” he replied. “I came with Jim. To rescue you.”

Ben glanced to the window, a slight frown curling the edge of his mouth. "So those are—you came with the wolf clan?" he asked, an odd tone in his voice.

"Jim's," Eddie said. "He's a werewolf—"

"I should have guessed—" He glanced toward the door. "Where is he?"

"Downstairs," said Eddie slowly. "He killed Hagarty. I came up to look for you—"

"He's going to have to call them off," said Ben.

Eddie looked at him uncomprehendingly. "What?"

"Jim," said Ben. "He's going to have to call off his pack. There's been a misunderstanding."

"What, you kidnapped yourself?" He'd meant to sound teasing, but his voice was too thin. "Come on, Ben."

Eddie yanked at his wrist, but Ben resisted. He was looking at Eddie intently, and Eddie realized with a jolt what he had not noticed in his first rush of relief.

The last time Eddie had seen him, he'd been cut and bruised, clothes stained with dirt and blood, his hair filthy with ichor and dust. Now he was dressed in a loose white shirt and dark pants, his scrubbed hair falling all around his face, pale gold and flyaway. He swept a few strands out of his eyes with a slim hand, and Eddie saw that his heavy silver ring was back on his finger.

"Are those your clothes?" Eddie asked, baffled. "And—you're all bandaged up ..." His voice trailed off. "Pennywise seems to be taking awfully good care of you."

He smiled at Eddie with a weary affection. "If I told you the truth, you'd say I was crazy," he said.

"I wouldn't."

"My father gave me these clothes," Ben said.

The flutter became a rapid pounding. "Ben," Eddie said carefully, "your father is dead."

"No." He shook his head. Eddie had the sense that he was holding back some enormous feeling, like horror or delight—or both. "I thought he was, but he isn't. It's all been a mistake."

Eddie remembered what Keene had said about Pennywise and his ability to tell charming and convincing lies. "Is this something Pennywise told you? Because he's a liar, Ben. Remember what Keene said. If he's telling you your father is alive, it's a lie to get you to do what he wants."

"I've seen my father," said Ben. "I've talked to him. He gave me this." He tugged on the new, clean shirt, as if it were ineluctable proof. "My father isn't dead. Pennywise didn't kill him. Keene lied to me. All these years I thought he was dead, but he wasn't."

"Well, if your father's really in this place, then where is he? Did Pennywise kidnap him too?"

Ben's eyes were shining. The neck of his shirt was open and he could see the thin white scars that covered his collarbone, like cracks in the smooth golden skin. "My father—"

The door of the room, which Eddie had shut behind him, opened with a creak, and a man walked into the room.

It was Pennywise. His silvery close-cropped hair gleamed like a polished steel helmet and his mouth was hard. He wore a waist sheath on his thick belt and the hilt of a long sword protruded from the top of it. "So," he said, resting a hand on the hilt as he spoke, "have you gathered your things? Our Forsaken can hold off the wolf-men for only so—"

Seeing Eddie, he broke off midsentence. He was not the sort of man who was ever really caught off guard, but Eddie saw the flicker of astonishment in his eyes. "What is this?" he asked, turning his glance to Ben.

But Eddie was already fumbling at his waist for the dagger. He seized it by the hilt, jerking it out of its scabbard, and drew his hand back. Rage pounded behind his eyes like a drumbeat. He could kill this man. He *would* kill him.

Ben caught at his wrist. "No."

Eddie could not contain his disbelief. "But, Ben—"

"Eddie," Ben said firmly. "This is my father."

29. Pennywise

"I see I've interrupted something." Said Pennywise, his voice as dry as a desert afternoon. "Son, would you care to tell me who this is? One of the Denbrough children, perhaps?"

"No," said Ben. He sounded tired and unhappy. "This is Eddie. Edward Kaspbrak. He's a friend of mine. He—"

Pennywise's black eyes raked Eddie slowly, from the top of his disheveled head to the toes of his scuffed sneakers. They fastened on the dagger still gripped in his hand.

An indefinable look passed over his face—part amusement, part irritation. "Where did you come by that blade, young man? May I see it?"

"No!" Eddie took a step back, as if he thought Pennywise might lunge at him, and felt the blade plucked neatly out of his fingers. Ben, holding the dagger, looked at Eddie with an apologetic expression. "Ben," Eddie hissed, putting every ounce of the betrayal he felt into the single syllable of his name.

All he said was, "You still don't understand, Eddie." With a sort of deferential care that made Eddie feel sick to his stomach, he went to Pennywise and handed him the dagger. "Here you go, Father."

Pennywise took the dagger in his big, long-boned hand and examined it. "This is a kindjal, a Circassian dagger. This particular one used to be one of a matched pair. I'm surprised the Denbroughs let you have it."

"I never showed it to them," said Ben. "They let me have my own private things. They didn't pry."

"Of course they didn't," said Pennywise. He handed the kindjal back to Ben. "They thought you were Daniel Hanscom's son."

Ben, sliding the red-hilted dagger into his belt, looked up. "So did I," he said softly, and in that moment Eddie saw that this was no joke,

that Ben was not just playing along for his own purposes. He really thought Pennywise was his father returned to him.

“Eddie,” Pennywise said again, as if tasting the sound of his name. “Short for Edward? Not a name I would have chosen.”

There was a grim curl to his lips. *He knows I'm his son*, Eddie thought. *Somehow, he knows. But he isn't saying it. Why isn't he saying it?*

“I don't really care what you would have chosen,” Eddie said.

“I am sure,” replied Pennywise, leaning forward, “that you don't.”

“You're not Ben's father,” he said. “You're trying to trick us. Ben's father was Daniel Hanscom. The Denbroughs know it. Everyone knows it.”

“The Denbroughs were misinformed,” said Pennywise. “They truly believed—believe that Ben is the son of their friend Daniel. As does the Clave. Even the Silent Brothers do not know who he really is. Although soon enough, they will.”

“Eddie.” Ben leaned forward, nearly knocking over the glass at his elbow. “Just listen to him, will you? It's not like you thought. Keene lied to us.”

“I know,” said Eddie. “He betrayed us to Pennywise. He was Pennywise's pawn.”

“No,” said Ben. “No, Keene was the one who wanted the Mortal Cup all along. He was the one who sent the Raveners after your mother. My father—Pennywise only found out about it afterward, and came to stop him. He brought your mother here to heal her, not to hurt her.”

“And you believe that crap?” Eddie said in disgust. “It isn't true. Keene was working for Pennywise. They were in it together, getting the Cup. He set us up, it's true, but he was just a tool.”

“But he was the one who needed the Mortal Cup,” said Ben. “So he could get the curse off him and flee before my father told the Clave about everything he'd done.”

"I know that isn't true!" said Eddie hotly. "I was there!" He turned on Pennywise. "I was in the room when you came to get the Cup. You couldn't see me, but I was there. I saw you. You took the Cup and you lifted the curse off Keene. He couldn't have done it by himself. He said so."

"I did lift his curse," said Pennywise measuredly, "but I was moved by pity. He seemed so pathetic."

"You didn't feel pity. You didn't feel anything."

"That's enough, Eddie!" It was Ben. He stared at him. His cheeks were flushed as if he'd been drinking the wine at his elbow, his eyes too bright. "Don't talk to my father like that."

"He's not your father !"

"Sit down," said Pennywise. "Let him come to it on his own, Jonathan."

Ben subsided instantly, sinking back into the chair. Through the dizziness of vertigo, Eddie groped for understanding. Jonathan? "I thought your name was Ben," he said. "Did you lie about that, too?"

"No. Ben is my second name."

"Jonathan." Eddie said. "Do you have any idea who your mother is?"

Pennywise cut in. His voice was soothing. "Ben, I had thought to spare you. I thought a story of a mother who died would hurt you less than the story of a mother who abandoned you before your first birthday."

Ben's slim fingers tightened convulsively around the glass's stem. Eddie thought for a moment that it might shatter. "My mother is alive?"

"She is," said Pennywise. "Alive, and asleep in one of the downstairs rooms at this very moment. Yes," he said, cutting off Ben before he could speak, "Sonia is your mother, Jonathan. And Eddie—Eddie is your brother."

Ben jerked his hand back. The wineglass tipped, spilling frothing scarlet liquid across the white tablecloth.

"You're telling lies with a little bit of the truth mixed in, is all." Eddie shouted.

"This grows tiresome," said Pennywise. "If you want to hear the truth, Edward, this is the truth. You have heard stories of the Uprising and so you think I am a villain. Is that correct?"

Eddie said nothing. He was looking at Ben, who seemed as if he might be about to throw up. Pennywise went on relentlessly. "It is simple, really. The story you heard was true in some of its parts, but not in others-lies mixed in with a little truth, as you said. The fact is that Daniel Hanscom is not and has never been Ben's father. Hanscom was killed during the Uprising. I assumed Daniel's name and place when I fled the Glass City with my son. It was easy enough; Hanscom had no real relations, and his closest friends, the Denbroughs, were in exile. He himself would have been in disgrace for his part in the Uprising, so I lived that disgraced life, quietly enough, alone with Ben on the Hanscoms' estate. I read my books. I raised my son. And I bided my time." He fingered the filigreed edge of a glass thoughtfully. He was left-handed, Eddie saw.

"Then you let Ben think you were dead? You just let him think you were dead, all these years? That's despicable."

"Don't," said Ben again. He had raised his hands to cover his face. He spoke against his own fingers, voice muffled. "Don't, Eddie."

Pennywise looked at his son with a smile Ben couldn't see. "Ben had to think I was dead, yes. He had to think he was Daniel Hanscom's son, or the Denbroughs would not have protected him as they did. It was Daniel they owed a debt to, not me. It was on Daniel's account that they loved him, not mine."

"Maybe they loved him on his own account," said Eddie..

"A commendably sentimental interpretation," said Pennywise. "but unlikely. You do not know the Denbroughs as I once did." He did not seem to see Ben's flinch, or if he did, he ignored it. "It hardly matters,

in the end," Pennywise added. "The Denbroughs were intended as protection for Ben, not as a replacement family, you see. He has a family. He has a father."

Ben made a noise in his throat, and moved his hands away from his face. "My mother-"

"Fled after the Uprising," said Pennywise. "I was a disgraced man. The Clave would have hunted me down had they thought I lived. She could not bear her association with me, and ran." The pain in his voice was palpable-and faked, Eddie thought bitterly. The manipulative creep. "I did not know she was pregnant at the time. With Eddie." He smiled a little, running his finger slowly down the wineglass. "But blood calls to blood, as they say," he went on. "Fate has borne us to this convergence. Our family, together again. We can use the Portal," he said, turning his gaze to Ben. "Go to Derry. Go home."

An enormous crash came from downstairs, so loud that it sounded as if a wall of the hospital had collapsed in on itself. *Jim*, Eddie thought, springing to his feet.

Ben, despite his look of nauseous horror, responded automatically, half-rising from his chair, his hand going to his belt. "Father, they're-"

"They're on their way." Pennywise rose to his feet. Eddie heard footsteps. A moment later the door of the room was flung open, and Jim stood on the threshold.

"Where the hell is everybody?" Beverly asked, touching Bill's cold and trembling hand.

Richie, who was kneeled beside the bed, stood up and stared at Beverly. "If I knew, I would've told you."

Beverly sighed and touched Bill's forehead. "He's getting worse. Maybe I can call Stan and-"

"The mundane is useless right now."

Beverly rolled her eyes. "You're just upset with him because he interrupted your kiss with Eddie."

Richie looked surprised but immediately brushed it off. "I have more important things to think about."

"You didn't deny it."

Richie just exhaled annoyingly. And headed to the door. But when he was about to open it. A cold breeze came over them, and girl appeared. Beverly didn't recognized her at first. But now, seeing her in a green robe, her short brown hair glowing, she immediately knew who it was. Eleven.

"What the *hell* are you doing doing here?" Richie sounded confused and angry.

"Hello to you too." Eleven held a hand and put Richie aside, approaching Beverly and Bill. A curious glance came over her when she saw Bill on the bed. "What happened to him?"

"Demon poison." Beverly answered immediately. "Can you help him?"

"No," Richie said, standing in the doorway. "She doesn't care about him, she came here for something else. Didn't you?" He stared at Eleven, frowning.

Eleven didn't glance back at him. "I came here because I was was expecting to have a chat with Eddie. Is he here?"

"We don't know where he is" Beverly said. "But please, can you help him?"

"Of course I *can*, but that doesn't mean I *will*."

"What do you want? Money? Jewelry? Me dancing naked in the hallway?" Richie said, crossing his arms over his chest.

Eleven sighed. "What I want is *you* to get out of here."

"I *live* here."

"A spell this strong needs to be purified of angelic presence." Eleven looked at Richie. "Do you want me to save him or not?"

"Out of the room, Richie." Beverly pleaded with her eyes. "Don't you want to save Bill?"

Richie frowned, stared at Bill and then at Beverly. "Fine." He turned and exited the room.

"But wait, Bill is part angel, wouldn't that affect the spell?"

Eleven frowned. "What? Oh, no. I just wanted him out of the room, he's annoying."

Beverly almost laughed, but in such serious situation it didn't seem like the right thing to do. "Well, do it then."

"Sadly, extracting demon poison is more harder than it looks, it *is* a strong spell. I can't do it alone."

"Don't you have some witchy friends who can help you?" Beverly was desperate, she didn't know why. She barely knew Bill. But somehow, she wanted him to be saved.

"My *witchy* friends aren't here. They're probably in Tokio or Afghanistan. And your friend doesn't have much time."

"There must be something you can do!"

Eleven thought for a few minutes, and then her eyes landed on Beverly. "You can help me."

"*What?* No. I don't know how to use my magic, I told you."

"Then you'd better learn." Eleven stretched out her hand to Beverly. "Take my hand, I'll teach you."

Beverly took her hand, it felt cold immediately. Beverly almost pulled it away but resisted. "Okay, what do I do?"

"Just concentrate." Eleven said, calmly. Her voice sounded like she was in those yoga classes Beverly hated. "Just let the power go, feel

it, touch it, absorb it."

Beverly closed her eyes, and tried to feel the magic, it felt like a part of her was threatening to get out. The magic felt like a wave of electricity coming out of her body, making her chest go numb. Her necklace was glowing, her heart beating fast.

"That's it." Eleven said. "Now, take away the poison, destroy it."

Beverly looked at Bill and saw a black ink coming out of his body, like it was invisible and only she could see it. Eleven drew out her free hand and the black ink was absorbed by her hand, Beverly felt like she was running for miles, her legs hurt.

After a few minutes, she saw Bill's skin tone was back to normal, and that she was laying on the floor, her head pounding. She looked around, wanting to find Eleven and thank her. But she was gone.

Eddie bit back a cry. Jim was covered in blood, his jeans and shirt dark and clotted, the lower half of his face bearded with it. His hands were red to the wrists, the blood that coated them still wet and running. Eddie had no idea if any of the blood was his. He found himself running across the room to Jim and nearly tripping over himself in his eagerness to grab at his shirtfront and hang on, the way he hadn't done since he was eight years old.

"I'm covered in blood," Jim said. "Don't worry—it isn't mine."

"Then whose is it?" It was Pennywise's voice, and Eddie turned, Jim's arm protectively across his shoulders. Pennywise was watching them both, his eyes narrow and calculating. Ben had risen to his feet and come around the table and was standing hesitantly behind his father. Eddie could not remember him ever doing anything hesitantly before.

"Brooks's," said Jim.

Pennywise passed a hand over his face, as if the news pained him. "I see. Did you tear out his throat with your teeth?"

"Actually," said Jim "I killed him with this." With his free hand he held out the long thin dagger he had killed the Forsaken with. In the light Eddie could see the blue stones in the hilt. "Do you remember it?"

Pennywise looked at it, and Eddie saw his jaw tighten. "I do," he said, and Eddie wondered if he, too, were remembering their earlier conversation.

This is a kindjal, a Circassian dagger. This particular one used to be one of a matched pair.

"You handed it to me seventeen years ago and told me to end my life with it," said Jim, the weapon gripped tightly in his hand.

"If only I'd had the strength to kill you myself, you could have died a man."

"Like you?" asked Jim, and in that moment Eddie saw something in him of the Jim he'd always known, who could tell when he was lying or pretending. In the bitterness of his voice, Eddie heard the love he'd once had for Pennywise, curdled into a weary hatred. "A man who chains his unconscious wife to a bed in the hopes of torturing her for information when she wakes up? That's your bravery?"

Ben was staring at his father. Eddie saw the seizure of anger that momentarily twisted Pennywise's features; then it was gone, and his face was smooth. "I didn't torture her," he said. "She is chained for her own protection."

"Against what?" Jim demanded stepping farther into the room. "The only thing endangering her is you. The only thing that ever endangered her was you. She's spent her life running to get away from you."

"I loved her," said Pennywise. "I never would have hurt her. It was you who turned her against me."

Jim laughed. "She didn't need me to turn her against you. She learned to hate you on her own."

"That is a lie !" Pennywise roared with sudden savagery, and drew

his sword from the sheath at his waist. The blade was flat and matte black, patterned with a design of silver stars. He leveled the blade at Jim's heart.

Ben took a step toward Pennywise. "Father—"

"Jonathan, be silent !" shouted Pennywise, but it was too late; Eddie saw the shock on Jim's face as he stared at Ben.

"*Jonathan?*" he whispered.

Ben's mouth twisted. "Don't you call me that," he said fiercely, his gold eyes blazing. "I'll kill you myself if you call me that."

Jim, ignoring the blade pointed at his heart, didn't take his eyes off Ben. "Your mother would be proud," he said, so quietly that even Eddie, standing beside him, had to strain to hear it.

"I don't have a mother," said Ben. His hands were shaking. "The woman who gave birth to me walked away from me before I learned to remember her face. I was nothing to her, so she is nothing to me."

"Your mother is not the one who walked away from you," said Jim, his gaze moving slowly to Pennywise. "I would have thought even you," he said slowly, "were above using your own flesh and blood as bait. I suppose I was wrong."

"That's enough." Pennywise's tone was almost languid, but there was fierceness in it, a hungry threat of violence. "Let go of my son, or I'll kill you where you stand."

"I'm not your son," said Eddie fiercely, but Jim pushed him away, so hard that he nearly fell.

"Get out of here," he said. "Get to where it's safe."

"I'm not leaving you!"

"Eddie, I mean it. Get out of here." Jim was already lifting his dagger. "This is not your fight."

Eddie stumbled away from him, toward the door that led to the

landing. Maybe he could run for help, for Alaric—

Then Ben was in front of him, blocking his way to the door. Eddie had forgotten how fast he moved. “Are you *insane*?” Ben hissed. “They’ve broken down the front door. This place will be full of Forsaken.”

Eddie shoved at him. “Let me out—”

“So they can tear you apart? Not a chance.”

Eddie saw Jim glance toward them, startled by the noise, and in that moment of distraction Pennywise dove under his guard and, with a single forward thrust, drove the blade of his sword into Jim’s chest, just below his collarbone.

Jim’s eyes flew open as if in astonishment rather than pain. Pennywise jerked his hand back, and the blade slid back, stained red to the hilt. With a sharp laugh Pennywise struck again, this time knocking the weapon from Jim’s hand. It hit the floor with a hollow clang and Pennywise kicked it hard, sending it skittering under the table as Jim collapsed.

“NO!” Eddie shouted as, not looking at him, Jim began to pull himself painfully into a kneeling position.

“Why do you have to make it worse for yourself?” Ben demanded in a low, tense whisper. “Don’t look.”

Eddie was panting with exertion and pain. “Why do you have to *lie* to yourself?”

“I’m not lying!” His grip on Eddie tightened. “I just want what’s good in my life—my father—my family—”

Jim was kneeling upright now. Pennywise had raised the bloodstained sword. Jim’s eyes were closed, and he was murmuring something: words, a prayer, Eddie didn’t know.

“You have a family,” Eddie said. “Family, those are just the people who love you. Like the Denbroughs love you. Bill, Richie, Georgie—” His voice cracked. “Jim is my family, and you’re going to make me

watch him die? Is this the kind of man you want to be? Like—"

"Like my father," Ben said.

His voice was icy, distant, flat as the blade of a knife.

Pennywise raised his sword high over his head. The glow from the chandelier overhead exploding off the blade sent brilliant points of light stabbing into Eddie's eyes. "Jim!" he shrieked.

The blade slammed home—into the floor. Jim was no longer there. Ben, having moved faster than Eddie would have thought possible even for a Shadowhunter, had knocked him out of the way, sending him sprawling to the side. Ben stood facing his father over the quivering hilt of the sword, his face white, but his gaze steady.

"I think you should leave," Ben said.

Pennywise stared incredulously at his son. "What did you say?"

Jim had pulled himself into a sitting position. Fresh blood stained his shirt. He stared as Ben reached out a hand and gently, almost disinterestedly, caressed the hilt of the sword that had been driven into the floor. "I think you heard me, Father."

Pennywise's voice was like a whip. "Jonathan Benjamin Gray—"

Quick as lightning, Ben seized the hilt of the sword, tore it free from the floorboards, and raised it. He held it lightly, level and flat, the point hovering a few inches below his father's chin. "That's *not* my name," he said. "My name is Ben Hanscom."

"*Hanscom*?" Pennywise roared. "You have no Hanscom blood! Daniel Hanscom was a stranger to you—"

"So," said Ben calmly, "are you." He jerked the sword to the left. "Now move."

Notes for the Chapter:

The book is almost over, chapter 30 + epilogue, left
:c

30. A Door Into the Dark

Notes for the Chapter:

Penultimate chapter!!!!!!

Ben licked his dry lips. "The Cup, Father. Where is it?"

"In Derry," said Pennywise calmly. "Where you will never find it."

Ben's hand was shaking. "Tell me—"

"Give me the sword." It was Jim, his voice calm, even kind.

Ben sounded as if he were speaking from the bottom of a well. "What?"

Eddie took a step forward. "Give Jim the sword. Let him have it, Ben."

He shook his head. "I can't do that."

"Yes, you can," Eddie said gently.

At last, Ben nodded, curtly, without lowering his hand. But he did let Jim move to stand beside him, and place his hand over Ben's, on the hilt of the blade. "You can let go now, Jonathan," Jim said—and then, seeing Eddie's face, amended himself. "Ben."

"I have a suggestion," said Pennywise to Jim, in a surprisingly even tone.

"Let me guess," said Jim. "It's 'Don't kill me,' isn't it?"

Pennywise laughed, a sound without any humor in it. "I would hardly lower myself to ask you for my life," he said.

"Good," said Jim, nudging the other man's chin with his blade. "I'm not going to kill you unless you force my hand, Bob. I draw the line at murdering you in front of your own children. What I want is the Cup."

The roaring downstairs was louder now. Eddie could hear what sounded like footsteps in the corridor outside. "Jim—"

"I hear it," he snapped.

"The Cup's in Derry, I told you," said Pennywise, his eyes shifting past Jim.

Jim was sweating. "If it's in Derry, you used the Portal to bring it there. I'll go with you. Bring it back." Jim's eyes were darting. There was more movement in the corridor outside now, sounds of shouting, of something shattering. "Eddie, stay with your brother. After we go through, you use the Portal to take you to a safe place."

"I won't leave here," said Ben.

"Yes, you will." Something thudded against the door. Jim raised his voice. "Pennywise, the Portal. Move."

"Or what?" Pennywise's eyes were fixed on the door with a considering look.

"I'll kill you if you force my hand," Jim said. "In front of them, or not. The Portal. Now."

Pennywise spread his hands wide. "If you wish."

He stepped lightly backward, just as the door exploded inward, hinges scattering across the floor. Jim ducked out of the way to avoid being crushed by the falling door, turning as he did so, the sword still in his hand.

A wolf stood in the doorway, a mountain of growling, brindled fur, shoulders hunched forward, lips curled back over snarling teeth. Blood ran from innumerable gashes in his pelt.

Ben was swearing softly, a seraph blade already in his hand. Eddie caught at his wrist. "Don't—he's a friend."

Ben shot him an incredulous glance, but lowered his arm.

"Alaric—" Jim shouted something then, in a language Eddie didn't

understand. Jim snarled again, crouching closer to the floor, and for a moment, Eddie thought he was going to hurl himself at Jim. Then Eddie saw Pennywise's hand at his belt, the flash of red jewels, and realized that Pennywise still had Ben's dagger.

He heard a voice shout Jim's name, thought it was his own—then realized that his throat seemed glued shut, and that it was Ben who had shouted.

Jim slewed around, excruciatingly slowly, it seemed, as the knife left Pennywise's hand and flew toward him like a silver butterfly, turning over and over in the air. Jim raised his blade—and something huge and tawny gray hurtled between him and Pennywise. Eddie heard Alaric's howl, rising, suddenly cut off; heard the sound as the blade struck. Eddie gasped and tried to run forward, but Ben pulled him back.

The wolf crumpled at Jim's feet, blood spattering his fur. Feebly, with his paws, Alaric clawed at the hilt of the knife protruding from his chest.

Pennywise laughed. "And *this* is how you repay the unquestioning loyalty you bought so cheaply, Jimothy," he said. "By letting them die for you." He was backing up, his eyes still on Jim.

Jim, white-faced, looked at him, and then down at Alaric; shook his head once, and dropped to his knees, leaning over the fallen werewolf. Ben, still holding Eddie by the shoulders, hissed, "*Stay here, you hear me? Stay here,*" and set off after Pennywise, who was hurrying, inexplicably, toward the far wall. Did he plan to throw himself out the window?

"Like hell I will," Eddie muttered, moving to follow Ben. He paused only to grab the blue-hilted kindjal from the floor beneath the table, where Pennywise had kicked it. The weapon in his hand felt comfortable now, reassuring, as he pushed a fallen chair out of his way and approached the mirror.

Ben had the seraph blade out, its light casting a hard illumination upward, darkening the circles under his eyes, the hollows of his cheeks. Pennywise had turned and stood outlined in its light, his back against the mirror. In its surface, Eddie could also see Jim behind

them; he had set his sword down, and was pulling the red-hilted kindjal out of Alaric's chest, gently and carefully. Eddie felt sick and gripped his own blade more tightly. "Ben—" he began.

Ben didn't turn to look at him, though of course he could see him in the mirror reflection. "Eddie, I told you to wait."

"He's like his mother," said Pennywise. One of his hands was behind him; he was running it along the edge of the mirror's heavy gilt frame. "Doesn't like to do what he's told."

Ben wasn't shaking as he had been earlier, but Eddie could sense how thin his control had been stretched, like the skin over a drum. "I'll go with him to Derry, Eddie. I'll bring the Cup back."

"No, you can't," Eddie began, and saw, in the mirror, how his face twisted.

"Do you have a better idea?" he demanded.

"But Jim—"

"Jimothy," said Pennywise in a voice like silk, "is attending to a fallen comrade. As for the Cup, and Derry, they are not far. Through the looking glass, one might say."

Ben's eyes narrowed. "The mirror is the Portal?"

Pennywise's lips thinned and he dropped his hand, moving back from the mirror as the image in it swirled and changed like watercolors running in a painting. Instead of the room with its dark wood and candles, now Eddie could see green fields, the thick emerald leaves of trees, and a wide meadow sweeping down to a large stone house in the distance. He could hear the buzzing sound of bees and the rustle of leaves in wind, and smell the honeysuckle carried on the wind.

"I told you it was not far." Pennywise stood in what was now a gilt-arched doorway, his hair stirring in the same wind that ruffled the leaves on the distant trees. "Is it as you remember it, Jonathan? Has nothing changed?"

"That's not my home," Ben said. "This is my home now."

A spasm of fury twisting his features, Pennywise looked at his son. Eddie would never forget that look—it made him feel a sudden wild longing for his mother. Because no matter how angry his mother had been with him, Sonia had never looked at him like that. She had always looked at him with love.

“Very well,” Pennywise, and took a swift step back through the Portal so that his feet struck the earth of Derry. His lips curved into a smile. “Ah,” he said, “home.”

Ben stumbled to the edge of the Portal before stopping, a hand against the gilt frame. A strange hesitation seemed to have taken hold of him, even as Derry shimmered before his eyes like a mirage in the desert. It would only take a step—

“Ben, don’t,” Eddie said quickly. “Don’t go after him.”

“But the Cup,” said Ben. Eddie could not tell what he was thinking, but the blade in his hand was shaking violently as his hand shook.

“Let the Clave get it! Ben, please.” *If you go through that Portal, you might never come back. Pennywise will kill you. You don’t want to believe it, but he will.*

“Your brother is right.” Pennywise was standing amid green grass and wildflowers, the blades waving around his feet, and Eddie realized that though he and they were inches away from each other, they stood in different countries. “Do you really think you can win this? Though you have a seraph blade and I am unarmed? Not only am I stronger than you, but I doubt you have it in you to kill me. And you will have to kill me, Jonathan, before I’ll give the Cup to you.”

Ben tightened his grip on the angel blade. “I can—”

“No, you can’t.” Pennywise reached out, through the Portal, and seized Ben’s wrist in his hand, dragging it forward until the tip of the seraph blade touched his chest. Where Ben’s hand and wrist passed through the Portal, they seemed to shimmer as if they had been cast in water. “Do it, then,” said Pennywise. “Drive the blade in. Three inches—maybe four.” He jerked the blade forward, the dagger’s tip slicing the fabric of his shirt. A red circle like a poppy bloomed just

over his heart. Ben, with a gasp, yanked his arm free and staggered back.

“As I thought,” said Pennywise. “Too softhearted.” And with a shocking suddenness he swung his fist toward Ben. Eddie cried out, but the blow never connected; instead it struck the surface of the Portal between them with a sound like a thousand fragile shattering things. Spiderwebbing cracks fissured the glass-that-was-not-glass; the last thing Eddie heard before the Portal dissolved into a deluge of ragged shards was Pennywise’s derisive laughter.

31. Epilogue: The Ascent Beckons

The hospital hallway was blindingly white. After so many days living by torchlight, gaslight, and eerie witchlight, the fluorescent lighting made things look sallow and unnatural. When Eddie signed himself in at the front desk, he noticed that the nurse handing him the clipboard had skin that looked strangely yellowish under the bright lights. *Maybe she's a demon*, Eddie thought, handing the clipboard back. "Last door at the end of the hall," said the nurse, flashing a kind smile. *Or I could be going crazy.*

"I know," said Eddie. "I was here yesterday." *And the day before, and the day before that.* It was early evening, and the hallway wasn't crowded. An old man shuffled along in carpet slippers and a robe, dragging a mobile oxygen unit behind him. Two doctors in green surgical scrubs carried Styrofoam cups of coffee, steam rising from the surface of the liquid into the frigid air. Inside the hospital it was aggressively air-conditioned, though outside the weather had finally begun to turn toward fall.

Eddie found the door at the end of the hall. It was open. He peered inside, not wanting to wake Jim up if he was asleep in the chair by the bed, as he had been the last two times Eddie was here. But he was up and conferring with a tall man in the parchment-colored robes of the Silent Brothers. He turned, as if sensing Eddie's arrival, and he saw that it was Brother Murray.

Eddie crossed his arms over his chest. "What's going on?"

Jim looked exhausted, with three days' worth of scruffy beard growth, his glasses pushed up to the top of his head. Eddie could see the bulk of the bandages that still wrapped his upper chest under his loose flannel shirt. "Brother Murray was just leaving," he said.

Raising his hood, Murray moved toward the door, but Eddie blocked his way. "So?" he challenged him. "Are you going to help my mother?"

Murray came closer to him. Eddie could feel the cold that wafted off his body, like the steam from an iceberg. *You cannot save others until*

you first save yourself, said the voice in his mind.

"This fortune-cookie stuff is getting really old," Eddie said. "What's wrong with my mother? Do you know? Can the Silent Brothers help her like you helped Bill?"

We helped no one, said Murray. *Nor is it our place to assist those who have willingly separated themselves from the Clave.*

Eddie drew back as Murray moved past him into the hallway. He watched him walk away, mingling with the crowd, none of whom gave him a second glance. When Eddie let his own eyes fall half-shut, he saw the shimmering aura of glamour that surrounded him, and wondered what they were seeing: Another patient? A doctor hurrying along in surgical scrubs? A grieving visitor?

"He was telling the truth," said Jim from behind him. "He didn't cure Bill; that was Jane Ives. And she doesn't know what's wrong with your mother either."

"I know," said Eddie, turning back into the room. He approached the bed warily. It was hard to connect the small white figure in the bed, snaked over and under by a nest of tubes, with her vibrant flame-haired mother. Of course, her hair was spread out across the pillow like a shawl of coppery thread, but her skin was so pale that she reminded Eddie of the wax Sleeping Beauty in Madame Tussauds, whose chest rose and fell only because it was animated by clockwork. He took his mother's thin hand and held it, as he'd done yesterday and the day before. He could feel the pulse beating in Sonia's wrist, steady and insistent. *She wants to wake up*, Eddie thought. *I know she does.*

"Of course she does," said Jim, and Eddie started in the realization that he had spoken aloud. "She has everything to get better for, even more than she could know."

Eddie laid his mother's hand gently back down on the bed. "You mean Ben."

"Of course I mean Ben," said Jim. "She's mourned him for seventeen years. If I could tell her that she no longer needed to mourn-" he

broke off.

"They say people in comas can sometimes hear you," Eddie offered. Of course, the doctors had also said that this was no ordinary coma—no injury, no lack of oxygen, no sudden failure of heart or brain had caused it. It was as if she were simply asleep, and could not be woken up.

"I know," said Jim. "I've been talking to her. Almost nonstop." He flashed a tired smile. "I've told her how brave you've been. How she'd be proud of you. Her warrior son."

"I did the shopping you asked," Eddie said. "I got peanut butter and milk and cereal and bread from Fortunato Brothers." He dug into his jeans pocket. "I've got change—"

"Keep it," said Jim. "You can use it for cab fare back."

"Stan's driving me back," said Eddie. "In fact, he's probably downstairs now."

"Good, I'm glad you'll be spending some time with him." Jim looked relieved. "Keep the money anyway. Get some takeout tonight."

Eddie opened his mouth to argue, then closed it. Jim was, as his mother had always said, a rock in times of trouble—solid, dependable, and totally immovable. "Come home eventually, okay? You need to sleep too."

"Sleep? Who needs sleep?" he scoffed, but Eddie saw the tiredness in his face as he went back to sit down by his mother's bed. Gently, he reached to brush a strand of hair away from Sonia's face. Eddie turned away, his eyes stinging.

Belch's van was idling at the curb when he walked out of the hospital's main exit. The sky arced overhead, the perfect blue of a china bowl, darkening to sapphire over the Hudson River, where the sun was going down. Stan leaned over to pop the door for him. "Thanks."

"Where to? Back home?" Stan asked, pulling the van out into the traffic on First.

Eddie sighed. "I don't even know where that is anymore."

Stan glanced at him sideways. "Feeling sorry for yourself, Kaspbrak?" His tone was mocking, but gentle. If Eddie looked past him, he could still see the dark stains on the backseat where Bill had lain, bleeding, across Ben's lap.

"Yes. No. I don't know." Eddie sighed again. "Everything's changed. Everything's different. I wish sometimes it could all go back to the way it was before."

"I don't," said Stan, to his surprise. "Where are we going again? Tell me uptown or downtown at least."

"To the Institute," said Eddie. "Sorry," he added, as Stan executed a terrifically illegal U-turn. The van, turning on two wheels, screeched in protest. "I should have told you that before."

"Huh," said Stan. "You haven't been back yet, right? Not since-"

"No, not since," said Eddie. "Richie called me and told me they were fine. Apparently their parents are racing back from Derry, now that someone finally *actually* told them what's going on. They'll be here in a couple of days."

"Was it weird, hearing from Richie?" asked Stan, his voice carefully neutral. "I mean, since you..."

"Oh, shut up, Stan," Eddie said crossly. "I know what you mean, and no, it wasn't weird. Nothing ever happened between us anyway."

"Nothing?" echoed Stan, disbelief plain in his tone.

"Nothing," Eddie repeated firmly, glancing out the window. They were passing a row of restaurants, and he could see Taki's, brightly lit in the gathering twilight. They turned the corner just as the sun disappeared behind the rose window of the Institute, flooding the street below with seashell light that only they could see. Stan pulled up in front of the door and killed the engine, jittering the keys in his

hand. "Beverly is there, by the way. She is suddenly spending a lot of time with them."

"Do you think that it was a coincidence?" Eddie asked.

"Do I think what was a coincidence?"

"That we wound up in Pandemonium the same night that Richie and the others just happened to be there, pursuing a demon? The night before Pennywise came for my mother?"

Stan shook his head. "I don't believe in coincidences," he said.

"Neither do I."

"But I have to admit," Stan added, "coincidence or not, it turned out to be a fortuitous occurrence."

"The Fortuitous Occurrences," said Eddie. "Now there's a band name for you."

"It's better than most of the ones we've come up with," Stan admitted.

"You bet." He jumped down out of the van, slamming the door behind him. He heard Stan honk as he ran up the path to the door between the slabs of overgrown grass, and waved without turning around.

The interior of the cathedral was cool and dark, and smelled of rain and damp paper. His footsteps echoed loudly on the stone floor, and he thought of Richie in the church in Brooklyn: *There might be a God, Eddie, and there might not. Either way, we're on our own.*

In the elevator he stole a look at himself in the mirror as the door clanged shut behind him. Most of his bruises and scrapes had healed to invisibility. He wondered if Richie had ever seen him looking as prim as he did today. Eddie thought he looked about eight.

He heard the loud meows before the elevator door even opened. "Hey, Mews," he said, kneeling down by the wriggling gray ball on the floor. "Where is everyone?"

Mews, who clearly wanted his stomach rubbed, muttered ominously.

With a sigh Eddie gave in. "Demented cat," he said, rubbing with vigor. "Where-"

"Eddie!" It was Beverly, swooping into the foyer in a long red skirt, her hair piled on top of her head with jeweled clips. "It's so great to see you!" She descended on Eddie with a hug that nearly overbalanced him.

"Bev," Eddie gasped. "It's good to see you, too," he added, letting Beverly pull him up to a standing position.

"I was so worried about you," said Beverly brightly. "After you guys went off to the library, I was with Richie and Bill, I heard the most terrific banging explosion, and when I got to the library, of course, you were gone, and everything was strewn all over the floor. And there was blood and sticky black goo everywhere." She shuddered. "What was that stuff?"

"A curse," Eddie said quietly. "Keene's curse."

"Oh, right," Beverly said. "Anyway," she went on, "it was horrible, and I don't know what we would have done if Eleven hadn't showed up and magicked Bill back to health. Is that a word, 'magicked'?" She crinkled her eyebrows. "I helped her do that, and I found a note of her saying she would teach me. Ben also told us all about what happened on the island afterward. Are you okay?"

Eddie shrugged. "I think so, finding out that my dad is a psychotic killer and that I had a brother this whole time... That's a lot."

"I know," Beverly touched his shoulder. "But you're still you. That's what matters."

"Thanks, Bev."

"Also," Beverly raised an eyebrow. "Richie was so worried about you."

Eddie's eyes widened. "He was?"

Beverly nodded quickly. "He didn't admit it, but I saw the look on his face whenever I mentioned you. He's so much better when you're around, I could see that."

Eddie was about to protest when Bill swung into the entry-way on a pair of crutches. One of his legs was bandaged, his jeans rolled up to the knee, and there was another bandage on his temple, under the dark hair. Otherwise he looked remarkably healthy for someone who'd nearly died four days before. He waved a crutch in greeting.

"Hi," Eddie said, surprised to see him up and around. "Are you..."

"All right? I'm f-fine," Bill said. "I won't even need these in a f-few days."

Guilt swelled Eddie's throat. If it hadn't been for him, Bill wouldn't be on crutches at all. "I'm really glad you're okay, Bil," he said, putting every ounce of sincerity into his voice that he could muster.

Bill blinked. "Thanks."

"So, Eleven fixed you?" Eddie said.

"She did!" said Beverly. "It was so awesome. I helped her a little. I think I can get used to this magic thing."

Bill turned to Eddie. "Richie is up in the g-greenhouse if you want to see him," he said. "I'll w-walk you."

Eddie glanced at Beverly. "Go on," said Beverly. "I've got to meet Eleven later." She waved a hand at them. "Shoo."

They set off down the hallway together. Bill's pace was fast, even on crutches. Eddie had to jog to keep up. "I have short legs," Eddie reminded him.

"S-sorry." He slowed down, contrite. "So, you b-being Ben's brother..."

"Bill, don't."

"S-sure. Never mind." He clamped his lips together. "You don't w-want to talk about it."

"It's not that. I just don't know what to say about it." Eddie exhaled.

"I know I d-didn't kill Abbadon," Bill said. "But I appreciate Stan for t-

telling me I did."

Eddie laughed shakily. "You appreciate him *lying* to you?"

"That m-meant a lot," Bill shrugged. "Even after h-how I treated him, I should've s-saved him at the party."

"That's not your fault," Eddie said. "He's okay now anyway."

"I still feel r-responsible." Bill's tone was low. "I shouldn't have j-judged him too quickly. Or you."

"Stan is pretty judgable," Eddie said, his mouth turning up at the corners. "But once you get to know him you'll realize he is more valuable than you thought he was."

"He's also really w-weird," Bill said in a small voice. "In a g-good way."

Eddie nodded slowly. Not knowing what to say, or maybe because he knew exactly what to say.

They'd reached the bottom of the spiral staircase that led to the roof. "I c-can't go up." Bill tapped his crutch against a metal step. It rang tinnily.

"It's okay. I can find my way."

Bill made as if to turn away, then glanced back at him. "I should have g-guessed you were Ben's brother," he said. "You both have the same a-artistic talent."

Eddie paused, his foot on the lowest stair. He was taken aback. "Ben can draw?"

"Nah." When Bill smiled, his eyes lit like blue lamps. "I was just k-kidding. He can't draw a s-straight line." Chuckling, he swung away on his crutches. Eddie watched him go, bemused. A Bill who cracked jokes and poked fun at Ben was something he could get used to, even if his sense of humor was somewhat inexplicable.

The greenhouse was just as he'd remembered it, though the sky above the glass roof was sapphire now. The clean, soapy smell of the flowers cleared his head. Breathing in deeply, he pushed his way through the tightly woven leaves and branches. He found Ben sitting on the marble bench in the middle of the greenhouse. His head was bent, and he seemed to be turning an object over in his hands, idly. He looked up as Eddie ducked under a branch, and quickly closed his hand around the object. "Eddie." He sounded surprised. "What are you doing here?"

Eddie wanted to find the right words to say. "I-I thought Richie was here."

"He was, he left minutes ago."

"What is that?" Eddie asked, pointing to his closed hand.

Ben opened his fingers. A jagged shard of silver lay in his palm, glimmering blue and green at the edges. "A piece of the Portal mirror."

Eddie sat down on the bench next to him. "Can you see anything in it?"

Ben turned it a little, letting the light run over it like water. "Bits of sky. Trees, a path... I keep angling it, trying to see the manor house. My father."

"Pennywise," Eddie corrected. "Why would you want to see him?"

"I thought maybe I could see what he was doing with the Mortal Cup," Ben said reluctantly. "Where it was."

"Ben, that's not our responsibility anymore. Not our problem. Now that the Clave finally knows what happened, the Denbroughs are rushing back. Let them deal with it."

Now he did look at Eddie. Eddie wondered how it was that they could be brothers and look so little alike. Ben said, "When I looked through the Portal and saw Derry, I knew exactly what Pennywise was trying to do, that he wanted to see if I'd break. And it didn't matter-I still wanted to go home more badly than I could have

imagined."

Eddie shook his head. "I don't see what's so great about Derry. It's just a place."

Ben closed his hand over the shard again. "I was happy there. It was the only place I was ever happy like that."

"Ben..." The surface of the pond was green with fallen leaves. "How could you have been happy there? I know what you thought, but Pennywise was a terrible father. He killed your pets, lied to you, and I know he hit you-don't even try to pretend he didn't."

A flicker of a smile ghosted across Ben's face. "Only on alternate Thursdays."

"Then how could-"

"It was the only time I ever felt sure about who I was. Where I belonged. It sounds stupid, but..." He shrugged. "I kill demons because it's what I'm good at and what I was taught to do, but it isn't who I am. I don't know who I am anymore. There's darkness in me. It's always been there. And now I..."

"Ben," Eddie grabbed his free hand, it felt cold at first, but it slowly was warming up. "I know you're a good person. I don't know how, but we're gonna make sense of this, I promise."

Eddie wasn't so sure if that was true, but being with Ben in that exact moment, he could feel like anything was possible.

Richie was outside the Institute, holding a helmet on one hand, a enormous motorcycle perched on the middle of the street. "Hey, Eds." He said, Eddie could see the little sparks on his eyes after he said that.

"How-Where did you get this?" Eddie said, gesturing at the motorcycle.

"Eleven was complaining that someone had left it outside her house

the last time she had a party," said Richie. "I convinced her to give it to me."

"Richie..." Eddie began, but didn't finish, it felt like the words just couldn't come out of his mouth. "I think we need to talk."

"I thought we were doing that."

Eddie sighed. "I really want to know how are you doing."

"Same old Richie at your service." Richie made a reverence, which made Eddie rolled his eyes and laugh at the same time.

"You're an idiot." Eddie was smiling, he could see a smile creeping up in Richie's lips. He took a deep breath and with all the courage he had he talked. "Thank you. For everything. I don't know what I would do if you weren't here."

Richie looked surprised, a almost unnoticable blush was starting to appear on his face. "You're welcome."

"Can I ask you a question?" Eddie looked at Richie, his eyes were more clear, Eddie didn't realize that before.

Richie nodded slowly.

"Why did you kiss me?" Eddie was almost trembling, afraid of where this conversation was going.

Richie opened his mouth, then closed it. He made a thinking face, the one Eddie admired. "Why...didn't you kiss me back?"

"I..." Eddie licked his dry lips. "I was surprised."

"Me too," Richie's voice was calm. "I thought you might like it."

"I did." Eddie could feel himself blushing. "Is this something you want? Us?"

"Is this something *you* want?"

"I hate when you answer a question with another question."

Richie smirked. "Remember when I told you I had never seen an angel before?" he asked suddenly.

Eddie thought for a second, and then remembered that night at the Church. He nodded, confused of what was he going to say next.

Richie gave him a deep stare. "I lied."

Eddie was confused, then he understood what Richie meant, how he was looking at him, how his words were affecting him in all of the ways possible. Eddie gulped hard, approaching Richie, a decision already made up on his mind. He looked at Richie, it felt like his eyes were looking inside of him.

Now Eddie, standing on his tiptoes, grabbed Richie's shirt and locked lips with him. It felt different, more genuine. With a certain awkwardness, their lips moved slowly, as if they were dancing, a tingling appears from the depths of his chest, wishing that this moment would never end. Richie grabbed the back of his neck, making their mouths touching each other.

After a few seconds, Eddie moved apart, afraid that he might lose all the air of his lungs.

"Well," Richie smiled. "Does this means you want this?"

"I guess, I don't go around kissing guys." Eddie's heart was hammering in his chest.

"I can be very moody, I have a predilection for sleeping on the right side of the bed and I hate romantic dinners." Richie stroked Eddie's cheek, so gently that Eddie thought he might break.

Eddie smiled. "I'm very stubborn, I like to sleep on the left side of the bed and I love romantic dinners." He stroked Richie's hair.

"We're the perfect match, then." Richie leaned to kiss Eddie again, his hands grabbing his waist, Eddie's were on his hair. In that moment, Eddie forgot about Pennywise, and the demons and the blood, about everything. It was just Eddie and Richie.

Richie moved away and swung a leg over the seat, and beckoned

Eddie to come and sit behind him. "Let's go."

"Where?"

Richie led out a hand. "Do you trust me?"

Eddie took it immediately. "Always." and got on behind him. "If we crash into the parking lot of a Key Food, I'll kill you, you know that?"

"Don't be ridiculous," said Richie. "There are no parking lots on the Upper East Side. Why drive when you can get your groceries delivered?" The bike started with a roar, drowning out his laugh. Shrieking, Eddie grabbed hold of his belt as the bike hurtled down the slanted roof of the Institute and launched itself into space.

The wind tore his hair as they rose up, up over the cathedral, up above the roofs of the nearby high-rises and apartment buildings. And there it was spread out before him like a carelessly opened jewelry box, this city more populous and more amazing than he had ever imagined: There was the emerald square of Central Park, where the faerie courts met on midsummer evenings; there were the lights of the clubs and bars downtown, where the vampires danced the nights away at Pandemonium; there the alleys of Chinatown down which the werewolves slunk at night, their coats reflecting the city's lights. There walked warlocks in all their bat-winged, cat-eyed glory, and here, as they swung out over the river, he saw the darting flash of multicolored tails under the silvery skin of the water, the shimmer of long, pearl-strewn hair, and heard the high, rippling laughter of the mermaids.

Richie turned to look over his shoulder, the wind whipping his hair into tangles. "What are you thinking?" he called back to Eddie.

"Just how different everything down there is now, you know, now that I can see."

"Everything down there is exactly the same," he said, angling the cycle toward the East River. They were heading toward the Brooklyn Bridge again. "You're the one that's different."

Eddie's hands tightened convulsively on his belt as they dipped lower

and lower over the river. "Chee!"

"Don't worry." He sounded maddeningly amused. "I know what I'm doing. I won't drown us."

Eddie squinted his eyes against the tearing wind. "Are you testing what Bill said about some of these bikes being able to go underwater?"

"No." He leveled the bike out carefully as they rose from the river's surface. "I think that's just a story."

"But Richie," he said. "All the stories are true."

Eddie didn't hear him laugh, but he felt it, vibrating through his rib cage and into his fingertips. Eddie held on tightly as he angled the cycle up, gunning it so that it shot forward and darted up the side of the bridge like a bird freed from a cage. His stomach dropped out from under him as the silver river spun away and the spires of the bridge slid under his feet, but this time Eddie kept his eyes open, so that he could see it all.

Notes for the Chapter:

OMG!!!!!!! It's finally finished, thank you guys so much for reading this story and commenting and giving kudos, I appreciate all of you, when I was starting to post here I almost stopped writing and erased everything, but I'm glad I didn't.

Obviously, there's gonna be a sequel. I'm planning on a trilogy. Maybe more. But right now, I'm gonna focus on the present, I don't know when the sequel will be published. But hopefully will be soon. I'm gonna wait a little longer to publish it tho, but you guys know me so I will probably publish it tomorrow because I'm impatient XD

Thank you again, see you in "City of Ashes" ;)